



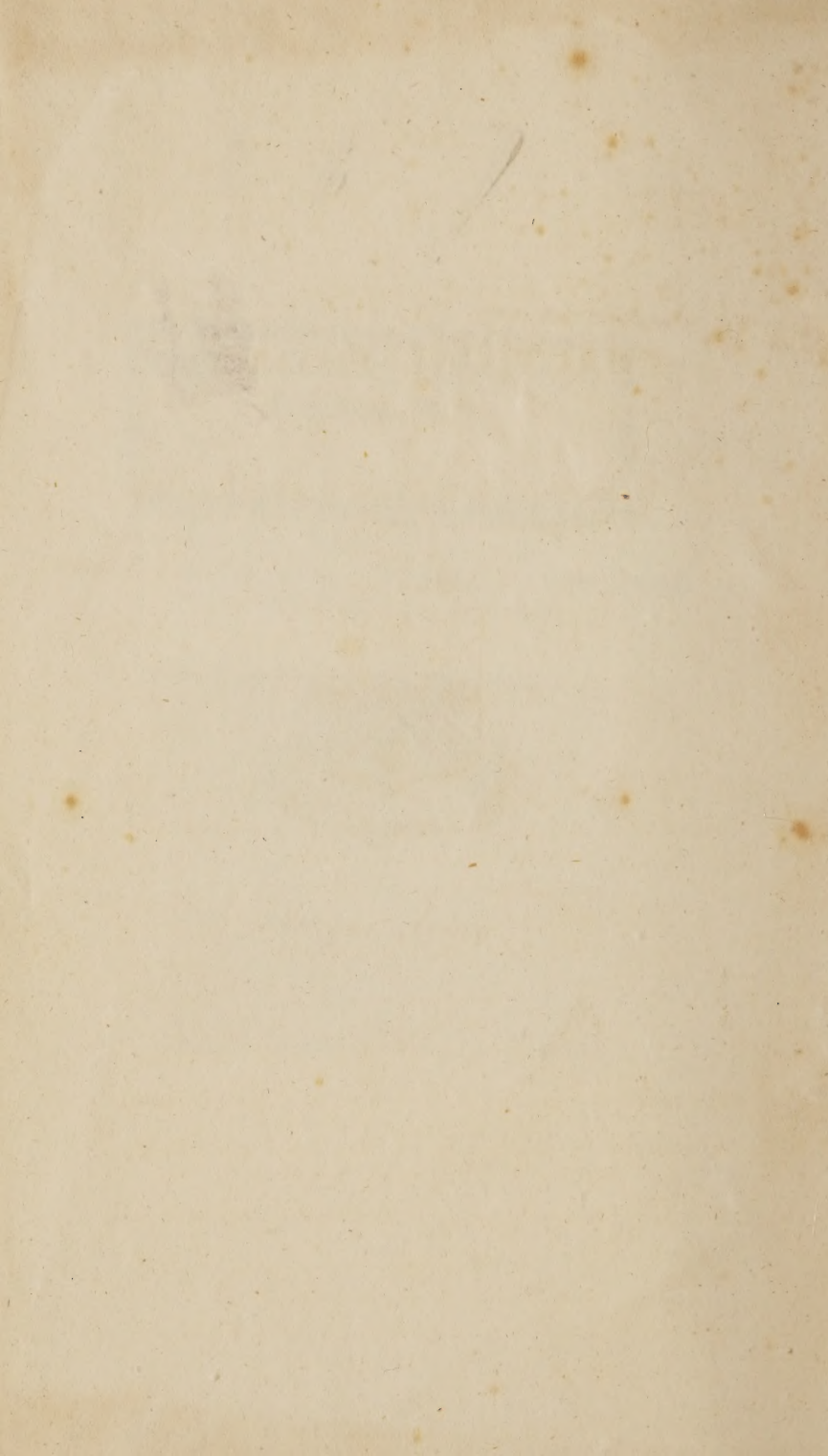
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The Christian system



James Lenox.



THE
CHRISTIAN SYSTEM

UNFOLDED IN A COURSE OF

PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON

THE PRINCIPAL DOCTRINES AND DUTIES

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THOMAS ROBINSON, M.A.

VICAR OF ST. MARY'S, LEICESTER; AND LATE FELLOW OF
TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

THE SECOND EDITION.

VOL. I.

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS, IN FAITH AND LOVE,
WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS.—

FOR THE TIME WILL COME, WHEN THEY WILL NOT ENDURE
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THE
CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

VOLUME THE FIRST,

CONTAINING

Practical Essays

ON

THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES,

THE STATE OF MAN,

THE CHARACTER AND OFFICES

OF

JESUS CHRIST.

INTRODUCTION.

THE author submits to the public eye the following statement of his views of revealed religion, not without fear respecting his execution of the work, but with a cheerful hope of its utility through the divine blessing. He comes not forward as a disputant or a controversialist; but as a plain, practical writer, desirous to promote the purposes of Christian faith and holiness. He is willing that others should judge and speak for themselves; and towards those, from whom he differs, he wishes to exercise, as he ought, candour and charity. At the same time he claims the liberty of maintaining his own sentiments with firmness, as being persuaded of their truth and importance. They have not been formed in haste, but after serious inquiry and deliberation; and they are now advanced, as he trusts, with humility and caution.

The chief attention of his life has been occupied by these subjects, not merely in the retirement of his study, but in the active performance

of his ministerial duties. He has been labouring, not without effect, to establish among the people of his charge what he conceives to be the fundamental principles of the gospel, and upon them as a firm basis to erect the superstructure of Christian morality, of solid devotion, and of vital holiness. And now, with a view to their spiritual progress, and in the hope that his instructions may be remembered with advantage after his personal services on earth are terminated, he sends to them from the press the substance of what he has invariably delivered from the pulpit. They are requested to consider the work as primarily undertaken for their benefit, and to accept it as a token of his pastoral care and most affectionate regard for them.

His desire is to speak to them in private as well as in public: and he has here endeavoured to provide them with a course of reading in their families, comprehending all the main articles of our creed in a connected order, and from the belief of Christianity enforcing its practice by a particular and earnest application. Let such a plan of domestic instruction be introduced and constantly maintained in their houses, and he shall indulge the hope of enlarging and continuing his usefulness among them.

It is probable that he may be read by many others; and to all of every description he strongly recommends a serious examination of those

principles, which are to himself the source of richest consolation. He bespeaks their attention and candour, while he endeavours to unfold to their view **THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM**, and lays before them in the plainest and most unreserved manner the principal doctrines and duties of our holy religion. He has searched the scriptures with diligence, and from them he professes to draw all his deductions.

His plan has been, after considering the strong and decisive evidences of the inspiration of the old and new testament, and attending to that state of mind with which they ought to be received, to investigate what is their grand object and what their most important contents. They were undoubtedly designed to communicate the knowledge of the true God and of his will concerning us. They exhibit his character in the varied perfections of his nature, and call upon us to yield to Him all possible reverence, love, and obedience. They describe his formation of the earth, and the peculiar administration of its government by himself.

Man is introduced to our view as a creature of high excellence and dignity, as bearing the image, and constituted the vicegerent, of Jehovah. But he is also represented as having fallen from his original eminence, and sunk into a deplorable state of depravation and misery.

Here the system becomes unspeakably inte-

resting. To console us in our distress, to rescue us from merited and impending ruin, a divine person interposes; and to Him give all the scriptures witness. He is the grand subject of revelation: "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending." It is therefore requisite that we fix a large share of our attention upon Him, and inquire what are the offices he sustains, and by what means he procures reconciliation for us. We behold him relinquishing the glories of the heavenly world, and voluntarily submitting to the deepest humiliation and sufferings upon earth. He saves by various methods; and in the accomplishment of his great work a distinct consideration is given to his teaching, his example, his righteousness, his atonement, his intercession, and his government.

Another divine person is introduced in this vast economy, co-operating with the Saviour, and fulfilling his gracious purposes. The Holy Ghost claims our adoration, affiance, gratitude, and love. By the most amazing process He recovers men to the knowledge, the similitude, the service, and the enjoyment of God. He brings them to the present possession of the blessings of redemption; He forms their character; He guides, preserves, and cheers them; and gradually prepares them for the fruition of the eternal inheritance reserved in heaven for them.

Our attention is then directed to this "chosen

generation," this "peculiar people," whom the Lord has saved. They are distinguished, not more by their high privileges and consolations, than by their steadfast perseverance in moral and religious duties. The rule of obedience is proposed, its extent is shewn, and its excellence vindicated. The servants of God are also men of prayer, and are daily surrounding the throne of grace with their importunate petitions. They are instructed what and how they should ask, and are assured that they shall obtain the blessings they supplicate. They are considered also in a collective capacity, are incorporated into a spiritual society, and by certain divine institutions they maintain communion with their heavenly Father and with each other. Such is the Church of Christ on earth; and all its faithful members are in succession removed to a better world, where the whole company will shortly be assembled together, and, receiving their "perfect consummation and bliss both in body and soul," shall reign with their exalted Head in glory everlasting.

These are the outlines of the system here proposed, and the author does not hesitate to pronounce that the representation is scriptural, and contains the substance of genuine Christianity. It is probable that his publication may be examined with a critical acumen, for the purpose of determining the party, with which he must be

ranked, or assigning to his system some discriminating name. He is not solicitous about the result of such an inquiry. All he asks is, that the solemn declarations he now makes may be credited : he has not implicitly attached himself to any leader, however eminent for learning, piety, or usefulness. In this sense he calls no man master. Much less does he wish to erect the standard of faction, or establish any Shibboleth. There are writers, whose theological sentiments he considers as more congenial with his own, than those of some others. But he is not conscious of taking up any one opinion on their authority, or bowing to their decisions with servile submission : probably from most of them he may differ in certain respects.

Whatever appellation may be given him, he will still maintain that he has followed no other guide than the inspired volume : only he will add, that he has received peculiar satisfaction upon finding himself in perfect agreement with the principles of our established church. Her creeds, her articles, her plan of worship, her ministry, and government, he approves, he reveres, as more agreeable to the scriptures, than those of any other Christian society : and he is desirous of employing his influence, whatever it may be, for the support of this venerable fabric, which it has pleased God to honour in a distinguished manner, and which he hopes will long be continued

as the brightest ornament of this favoured kingdom. He therefore acknowledges no other character than that of a regular and consistent minister of the church of England; and he conceives that in this capacity he is most effectually promoting the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the best interests of society.

The fastidious critic should be apprized that this work is not adapted to his taste. Here are no learned or curious disquisitions to amuse him; no ornaments of style or language to yield him pleasure. It would have been easy to multiply references to writers of high credit, and to produce large quotations, in support of this view of the Christian system. But such a mode would have swelled the publication to an unnecessary and inconvenient length, and might have been censured as an ostentatious display of extensive reading. It is sufficient for the purposes intended, if the numerous texts of scripture, which are cited, confirm the doctrines advanced. The author's plan is to state the substance of revelation, and he has thought it most expedient to express himself in the very language of the sacred penmen, without aiming at any adventitious embellishments.

He has not been solicitous to avoid a repetition of sentiment in different parts of his work: nor does he think it any objection, that one essay adverts to some momentous truths, which have

been enlarged on in another. It should be considered, that he meant to render each essay a distinct reading, and to produce upon every subject the various considerations belonging to it. Of necessity therefore he must sometimes say the same things, which he had done before; though with some variation of manner. He is confident this will not displease those serious persons, whose object is, not speculation or debate, but their own spiritual improvement.

He wishes to remind himself and others, that the opinion of the world is of little consequence to those, who should consider themselves as dying men, whose time of trial will soon be terminated, who are about to appear before the tribunal of Christ, and who must abide by his infallible decision. He is chiefly anxious, that his divine Master may graciously accept this service, and by his blessing render it effectual for the propagation of his truth, the enlargement and edification of his church: so shall the praise be given, where it is due, to himself alone:—"To Him be glory both now and for ever." Amen.

CONTENTS.

That the different parts of the system of revealed religion here unfolded may be more clearly viewed in their connexion and dependence, it was thought expedient to prefix a large table of the Contents of the whole three volumes, which will also serve the purpose of an Index.

VOLUME I.

ESSAY 1. On the divine Origin of the Holy Scriptures.

THE old and new testament contain a wonderful system,—and are authentic,—written by those, whose names they bear,—who wrought miracles,—predicted future events,—harmonized with each other,—their language and style appropriate,—their system not of human contrivance, but by its propagation, tendency, and effects, proved to be divine, and to be delivered by inspiration.

ESSAY 2. On the different Characters of the Infidel and the Believer.

The word of God is denominated “light,”—rejected by those only, who do evil,—who hate the light,—and who fear con-

viction,—but is valued by those, who possess integrity,—who do not shun but court the examination of the light,—and whose deeds are wrought in God.

ESSAY 3. On the Power of God.

The existence of God appears from the light of nature, as do many of his attributes. Yet these are better learnt from the scriptures; where it is proved, that He possesses unlimited power,—from his works of creation,—from his providence,—from the government, which he exercises,—and from the operations of his grace.

ESSAY 4. On the Wisdom and Knowledge of God.

The infinite understanding of God, his wisdom, and knowledge, are manifest from the works which he has made;—from his providence and government,—from the plan of redemption,—and the methods of his grace.

ESSAY 5. On the Goodness of God.

Love to God is not excited merely by his power and wisdom, but by his goodness. This attribute He claims, and it appears in the whole of his character and conduct, as our Creator,—Preserver,—and Redeemer.

ESSAY 6. On the Patience of God.

The patience of God is displayed upon the earth, and its greatness appears, I. From what we are, as committing sins, —in various instances,—frequently repeating them,—with many aggravations,—especially backsliding,—possessing a degenerate nature,—and the whole human race being in the same apostate state. II. From God's other attributes, his sovereign majesty,—power,—holiness,—justice,—and goodness.

ESSAY 7. On the Holiness of God.

The holiness of God justly excites admiration. This attribute proved, from his self-existence,—his moral government,—the testimony of our conscience,—the declarations of scripture,—the extent and spirituality of the law,—the system of mercy in the gospel,—the proceedings of the last day,—and the final separation of the righteous from the wicked. What effect it should produce upon us.

ESSAY 8. On the Justice of God.

The justice of God is deducible from his holiness:—proved, from the common course of his providence,—some signal interpositions,—the nature and sanctions of the divine law,—the salvation by Jesus Christ,—and the final decision in judgment. Objections from the present unequal distribution, and from the divine benevolence, considered and answered.

ESSAY 9. On the Mercy of God.

The mercy of God is manifested to us,—not satisfactorily by the light of nature,—but by divine revelation in the fullest manner. It is unmerited,—distinguishing,—plenteous, and immutable,—and exercised with a regard to other perfections.

ESSAY 10. On the Veracity of God.

The veracity of God follows from his other attributes. He cannot lie; and on this ground,—his declarations should be credited,—his promises claim our entire affiance,—and the execution of his threatenings should be expected.

ESSAY 11. On the Trinity in Unity.

Caution and humility necessary in our inquiries about the mode of God's existence. There is only one Jehovah,—but a

plurality of persons is expressly revealed,—divine honours being ascribed to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The doctrine mysterious,—but important, and of a practical tendency.

• ESSAY 12. On the Creation of Man.

Man is God's principal workmanship upon earth: whence consider,—our creation,—the original constitution of our nature, as including the divine image,—and the chief end and design of our formation.

ESSAY 13. On the Corruption of Man's Understanding.

Man's fallen state,—introduced by the sin of our first parents,—appears in the corruption of all his faculties,—in that of his understanding,—the extreme degeneracy of which is proved,—by the state of the Gentile world,—by that of places favoured with revelation,—by the declarations of holy scripture,—by the case of real believers,—and by the extreme stupidity of men in general, as to spiritual things, even under greatest advantages.

ESSAY 14. On the Depravity of the Human Will.

The nature and freedom of the will considered. Its depravity appears, inasmuch as man invariably chooses evil, from his very birth,—and is obstinately bent upon it;—which is confirmed by sad examples,—by the declarations of scripture,—and of the church. Objections answered.

ESSAY 15. On Man's depraved Affections towards God.

The character of man must be collected from facts, as well as from the scriptures. What the affections are; and how

exercised towards God. They are extremely depraved, as man is indisposed to think of God,—is averse to his service,—and shews the strongest dislike of his being and perfections, of his government, law, and gospel.

ESSAY 16. On Men's depraved Affections
towards each other.

Man is not affected towards his fellow-creatures, as a pure and holy being would be; which appears from the general violation of all relative duties,—from the prevalence of envy,—from the sad and universal abuse of the tongue,—from the corruption of the world through lust,—from the general want of probity,—and from the malignant tempers which every where prevail.

ESSAY 17. On Men's depraved Affections
with respect to themselves.

Man, considered in his individual capacity, appears a depraved creature, and actuated by wrong affections, as he is proud,—selfish,—foolish, weak, and inconsistent,—and carried away by sensual desires.

ESSAY 18. On Man's Depravity in his Imagination, Judgment, Memory, and Conscience.

Man's depravity appears in the perversion of his various mental faculties,—in his imagination,—in his judgment,—in his memory,—and in his conscience, which is often erroneous, weak, and callous.

ESSAY 19. On the Misery of Man as a Sinner.

Sin has introduced much misery into the world. There is a general dissatisfaction among all ranks.—Man is continually liable to calamities and bodily afflictions,—experiences great disquietude in his mind,—and as a moral creature is unhappy, dreading futurity.

ESSAY 20. On Man's State of Condemnation.

Man, as a depraved creature, is under condemnation. He is accused by his own conscience, and in his present sufferings is marked by God's displeasure.—God's righteous character requires some token of his indignation.—His holy law declares every one accursed ;—and his gospel is founded on man's liableness to punishment. What this punishment is : its eternal duration.

ESSAY 21. On Man's Inability to recover himself.

Man is declared to be helpless as well as guilty. He has no power to recover himself, as he cannot remove the sad effects of sin,—with respect to God,—or his fellow-creatures,—or himself.—The salvation proposed in the gospel proves his inability ;—and all, who are redeemed to God, acknowledge it.

ESSAY 22. On Salvation by Grace alone.

A brighter prospect opens.—We are not left in despair.—Salvation is entirely of grace.—The plan originated with God,—and was carried into effect by himself alone,—sending his Son into the world, and admitting of his mediation by sacrifice.—He appoints the means of grace and the publication of the gospel, where and by whom he pleases.—The reception and enjoyment of this salvation depend upon his influence, which is so bestowed as to display the freeness of his grace.—The progress also and completion of the work prove it to be of God.

ESSAY 23. On the Godhead of the Saviour.

Different opinions maintained concerning the person of our Redeemer. His real Godhead proved, from the testimony of ancient prophets,—of himself,—of apostles,—of holy angels,

—of the catholic church ;—from his names and attributes ;—
 from his works and offices ;—from the high regard due to him.
 —The doctrine mysterious but important.

ESSAY 24. On the Humiliation of the Saviour.

The abasement of Christ wonderful ; but acquiesced in by faith.—The time of his appearance most suitable : the circumstances evince his grace and condescension.—He assumed our nature, and submitted to the lowest state.—As man, he has exhibited a perfect pattern,—honoured the law,—redeemed us from the curse,—and obtained for us an inheritance.

ESSAY 25. On the prophetical Character of Jesus Christ.

Jesus appeared as a prophet,—according to ancient predictions,—resembled Moses,—taught the authority, extent, and spirituality of the divine law,—the necessity of regeneration,—salvation through faith in his blood,—and foretold many future events. Never man spake with so much wisdom,—tenderness,—and dignity. Yet he is disregarded in this character.

ESSAY 26. On the Example of Jesus Christ.

The general influence of example. Necessity of a consistent conduct in public teachers. Jesus Christ is the only perfect pattern, I. with respect to God,—in subjection to his will,—constant and cheerful obedience,—zeal for his glory,—ardent devotion,—patient resignation. II. With respect to himself,—in condescension and submission,—magnanimity,—and heavenly-mindedness. III. With respect to men,—in a firm resistance of evil,—subjection to parents and governors,—kindness and compassion,—forbearance and love of enemies.

ESSAY 27. On the Righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The obedience of Christ was designed to be more than an example. The law requires from us a perfect righteousness,—which we cannot perform,—but the gospel provides. Christ fulfilled the law for us.—His righteousness meritorious,—imputed to believers,—so represented by prophets and apostles. But the faith, which receives it, is not meritorious. The doctrine guarded and improved.

ESSAY 28. On the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Part I.

The sufferings and death of Christ much insisted on:—their nature and design. The general dread of God shews a conviction of the necessity of some propitiation. That Jesus Christ made a real and efficacious atonement by his blood, appears from the ancient types and figures,—from express declarations of scripture,—from every part of practical Christianity,—and from the worship of heaven.

ESSAY 29. On the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Part II.

The death of Christ, though generally disregarded by men, is the object of God's counsels,—held forth to our view as the appointed atonement,—in all the scriptures,—in the ministry of the gospel,—in the Lord's supper,—admired and rejoiced in by believers, as a proof and instance of the love of God,—a manifestation of his righteous character,—vindicating the authority and excellence of his law,—confirming our hopes. Yet objected to,—as contrary to reason,—as dishonourable to the divine character,—as hostile to morality.

ESSAY 30. On the Resurrection and Intercession of Christ.

Our security depends on the re-assumed life of Christ. That he rose from the dead, appears from the testimony of his apostles,—and from the communications of his grace;—shews the truth of his doctrine,—his Deity,—the efficacy of his sacrifice,—his triumph over enemies,—and the opening of the kingdom of heaven to us. That he maketh intercession with the Father,—clearly declared,—typified by the Jewish high-priest,—represented by his own prayer on earth:—for whom this intercession is carried on:—no other necessary:—suggests strong consolation.

ESSAY 31. On the Mediatorial Government and Second Advent of Christ.

Jesus Christ is king as well as priest. The mediatorial government intrusted to him,—implies no inferiority to the Father,—is universal and absolute,—secures to his people the supply of all their wants,—affords them protection,—ensures their perseverance,—requires obedience,—not yet acknowledged, as it will be.—His second advent is foretold,—will be glorious.—He will then complete the salvation of the redeemed,—destroy his enemies,—and resign his mediatorial authority.

VOLUME II.

ESSAY 32. On the Personality and Divinity of the Holy Spirit.

The interposition of the Holy Spirit necessary. We may prove, I. His personality, from his attributes and operations. II. His distinct personality,—by his procession both from the Father and the Son,—his appropriate offices,—separate appearances,—and the particular mention made of him. III. His divinity,—from his names,—perfections,—works,—and the regard due to him.

ESSAY 33. On the Influences and Operations of the Holy Spirit. Part I.

The subject difficult,—and mysterious,—treated with contempt,—much abused. Proper to consider, I. What the Spirit did in former times,—chiefly with respect to redemption,—raising up and qualifying men for great usefulness,—restraining sinners,—inspiring prophets,—co-operating with Christ,—giving miraculous powers to the apostles,—founding churches, &c. II. What he does in the present age.—His general influences vindicated against those, who object to them as absurd, unnecessary, or dangerous.

ESSAY 34. On the Influences and Operations of the Holy Spirit. Part II.

The assistance of the Holy Spirit may be expected, because— it was predicted in the old testament,—it was the special promise of Christ to his church,—it is the peculiar privilege of the gospel,—it is described as essential to true religion ;—and all, who are destitute of this grace, are in a state of condemnation.

ESSAY 35. On the Illumination of the Spirit.
Part I.

The assistance of the Spirit is adapted to our necessities. His illumination of the understanding is proved,—from many express promises,—from the prayers offered up for it,—and from the general description given of true believers.

ESSAY 36. On the Illumination of the Spirit.
Part II.

The Spirit teaches no new truths, but opens the understanding to understand the scriptures,—guides the humble, and not the self-sufficient,—gives spiritual apprehensions, accompanied with, but distinct from, holy affections,—does not cherish pride,—does not render infallible, or teach all equally,—is often imperceptible in the beginning, and always gradual in the progress of his illumination.

ESSAY 37. On the Work of the Spirit in
Regeneration. Part I.

Christians are described as renewed in their minds. Of this change consider,—the nature,—the author,—and the means, by which it is usually effected: such are—the word of God,—the ministry,—and prayer.

ESSAY 38. On the Work of the Spirit in
Regeneration. Part II.

In regeneration we may further consider—its effects and evidences; such are penitential sorrow, importunate prayer, deliverance from sin, submission and conformity to Christ, spirituality of mind, and victory over the world:—its necessity,—for good works,—for communion with God,—and for the fruition of heaven.

ESSAY 39. On the Work of the Spirit in Regeneration. Part III.

Regeneration is more than an external ablution by baptism,—or reformation,—or a change of religious parties or opinions.—The doctrine is exposed to reproach by those,—who depend upon visions or impressions,—who neglect the means of grace,—or who attend not to its practical effects and evidences.—It is congruous to reason,—and favourable to real holiness.

ESSAY 40. On true Repentance.

Repentance forms a part of the Christian system,—has respect only to sinners,—is attended with compunction, sorrow, and shame,—with an entire renunciation of sin, and especially of the besetting sin,—will produce a desire of repairing the mischief of past offences, both towards God and men,—is the gift of God,—indispensably necessary,—will find acceptance,—yet of itself insufficient,—not to be delayed.

ESSAY 41. On the Nature of Faith in Christ. Part I.

Faith constitutes a prominent part of the Christian character. How we receive the witness of men,—how that of God,—and on what ground our belief rests. What God has revealed ;—Redemption by Christ the main subject.—What faith is, with reference to this.—It is not a mere assent to the gospel,—or a general persuasion of facts and doctrines,—or a full assurance.—It does not include obedience, but produces it.

ESSAY 42. On the Nature of Faith in Christ. Part II.

Faith, in its more restricted sense, is fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ,—as a divine person,—as becoming incarnate,—per-

forming complete obedience,—offering an expiatory sacrifice,—and sustaining various offices.—It includes knowledge,—approbation,—and reliance.

ESSAY 43. On Justification by Faith. Part I.

The advantages of faith considered,—chiefly in justification, which is—a gracious act of God,—a blessing procured by the obedience of Christ,—received and enjoyed only by faith. That we are justified by faith alone,—and not by the moral law,—nor by a new remedial law,—nor by faith and works together.

ESSAY 44. On Justification by Faith. Part II.

Justification by faith alone, proved from the holy scriptures to be the divine appointment,—was the doctrine of the primitive church,—and is clearly established in the church of England. It is suitable to the fallen state of man,—humbling to the sinner,—displays the grace of God,—honours the Redeemer,—and is favourable to holiness. The doctrine most interesting,—lies at the foundation of Christianity,—the rejection of it fatal.

ESSAY 45. On Justification by Faith. Part III.

Truth opposed on various grounds. The objections against justification by faith considered.—Proved, that it does not make void, but establish, the law,—that it does not contradict other principles in the scriptures, especially the doctrine of St. James,—that it is not inconsistent with the account given us of the day of judgment,—and that it is not derogatory to human nature in its fallen state.

ESSAY 46. On Faith working by Love.

The importance of faith in Christ.—Its efficacy in promoting holiness, “working by love,”—producing love to God,—to Christ,—to man,—especially to “the brethren,”—to their souls and to their bodies.—How faith possesses such practical influence.

ESSAY 47. On Faith overcoming the World.

The practical tendency of faith appears in its raising the Christian above present things,—giving him the victory over the love of the world,—over the fear of its threats and persecution,—over all the calamities of life, and the terror of death. It possesses this energy, as being a realizing conviction of eternal things,—as placing God himself before us,—and as deriving strength and vigour from the Saviour.

ESSAY 48. On Faith producing Joy.

The principle of faith is commended to our regard as promoting present comfort, by affording the hope of reconciliation with God,—by giving assurance of support under troubles, and of their happy termination,—by opening a prospect of heaven,—and by producing a foretaste of future blessedness.—The gloom of persons accounted religious may arise—from indisposition of body or mind,—from temptation,—from a defect of faith,—or from declension and misconduct.

ESSAY 49. On the divine Origin of Faith.

That faith is the gift of God, proved from various scriptures. This implies more than that God has given us an external revelation,—or opportunities of instruction,—or assistance in the common exercise of our faculties. He alone removes all hinderances in the heart,—disposes sinners to

receive Christ,—and enables them to persevere in their dependence. Yet means should be used,—exhortations and arguments employed,—and men may be commended for faith, or punished for the want of it.

ESSAY 50. On the Necessity of Faith.

Men are much influenced by fear,—should consider the necessity of faith, and the dangerous state of unbelievers,—who treat God's authority with contempt,—deny all his testimonies concerning Christ,—reject his proffered mercy in the gospel,—are destitute of the right principle of obedience,—possess not in themselves any moral ability to do good,—and can assign no cause for their infidelity, but what will condemn them.

ESSAY 51. On the Nature of Sanctification. Part I.

Sanctification is connected with faith,—implies more than external dedication,—is a gradual purifying of the soul,—is more than moral virtue,—or than an external conformity to the law,—better than the most splendid gifts. The sanctification of Christians was the end of the divine counsels,—and one part of the design of Christ's sacrifice,—is the great object of the Spirit's operation,—the chief excellence and glory of the redeemed,—the principal thing which God requires, and they should aim at.—How it differs from Justification.

ESSAY 52. On the Nature of Sanctification. Part II.

It may be proper to consider the extensive nature of sanctification, as reaching to the whole man,—the body and the soul, in all their members and faculties,—and its peculiar

effects according to the objects presented. These may be investigated with respect to sin,—to duty,—to God,—to Christ,—and to the Holy Spirit.

ESSAY 53. On the Progress of Sanctification.

Sanctification is a gradual process, as appears from many express passages of scripture, which speak of the growth of grace,—from the similitudes made use of to describe the Christian character,—and from the experience of believers. Full perfection not attainable in this life, though to be desired and aimed at. Objections to this spiritual progress answered. The progress may be obstructed by remaining depravity,—by occasional temptations,—and by relapses into sin.

ESSAY 54. On the Completion of Sanctification.

The work of God in sanctification, however opposed and obstructed, will be carried on and completed, as appears—from the general testimony of the inspired writers,—from the perfections and engagements of God,—from the offices and relations of the Redeemer,—and from the operations of the Holy Spirit. Objections answered,—from declarations of scripture apparently opposite,—from exhortations and cautions given,—from the falls of eminent saints,—and from the supposed dangerous tendency of the doctrine.

ESSAY 55. On the Author and Means of Sanctification.

Sanctification has God for its author,—cannot be effected by human restraints or exertions, on account of man's corruption and inability.—It is what God promises,—the Saviour has obtained,—good men pray for,—the Spirit produces. But it is carried on by general means,—the revealed word,—the sacraments,—prayer,—afflictions,—and by continued faith in Christ.

ESSAY 56. On the Advantages of Sanctification.

Men must be excited to seek after sanctification by the view of its advantages, which are these,—it displays the glory of God,—it is the principal means of doing good,—it is the source of strongest consolation,—it is the safest evidence of acceptance with God,—it is the best preparation for heaven.—But it will not expiate past guilt,—it does not constitute our title to heaven,—it furnishes no proper cause of glorying.

ESSAY 57. On the Necessity of Sanctification.

Sanctification is not only highly advantageous, but indispensably requisite. Its necessity appears—from the holy nature of God,—from the declared purpose of his counsels,—from the divine commands,—from the work and offices of Christ,—from the nature of the Christian life,—and from the descriptions given of future blessedness.

ESSAY 58. On Christian Obedience.

Christians are discriminated by their obedience. To ascertain of what sort this obedience is, consider—the persons, by whom it is performed,—its rule,—its measure,—its principles,—and the happy effects resulting from it.

ESSAY 59. On the Comfort of the Holy Ghost.

To remove the prejudices of those, who object to religion, as of a gloomy tendency, it is maintained,—that there is a peculiar blessedness bestowed on true believers,—but that this joy is of a spiritual nature,—that the Holy Ghost is the author of it,—and that it is essentially connected with holiness.

ESSAY 60. On the Witness of the Spirit.

The Holy Ghost acts as a Spirit of adoption,—inspiring filial love and confidence. What his witness is,—and how it is connected with that of our own spirit.—This “full assurance of hope” is described as the privilege and attainment of believers,—yet is not essential to faith,—is a reasonable expectation,—and will produce the best effects.

VOLUME III.

ESSAY 61. On keeping the Commandments.

To ascertain the Christian character, we must examine the measure and the rule of duty. Man has always been under a law.—The decalogue, published from mount Sinai, is still binding.—It is most excellent.—The righteous God must enjoin obedience to it.—Its authority depends not on its publication by Moses.—We are not released from it by the death of Christ.—It is written in the hearts of the faithful.—They aim at universal obedience to it.—An understanding of it will produce—clearer knowledge of God,—deeper convictions of sin,—more ardent love to Christ,—a more honourable conduct,—and more genuine humility.

ESSAY 62. On the First Commandment.

God has declared his character and his will in the ten commandments. In the first he asserts his own supreme dominion, and forbids us to alienate our hearts from Him, or to fix them on any creature. He therefore requires us “to believe on him,—to fear him,—to love him with all our hearts, &c.—and to put our whole trust in him.”

ESSAY 63. On the Second Commandment.

A prohibitory law contains positive demands. We are here forbidden to make any representation of Jehovah,—to worship any creature, image, or likeness,—to be superstitious or formal in religious services.—We are required to acknow-

ledge God in worship,—and by suitable postures of body,—to serve him in his appointed means. The commandment is enforced by the considerations, that Jehovah is the Lord,—our God,—a jealous God,—visiting iniquity,—but also shewing mercy.

ESSAY 64. On the Third Commandment.

Reverence is due to God. He threatens despisers, in the third commandment.—Men “take his name in vain,”—by perjury,—by profane swearing,—by the wanton or needless use of it,—and by unmeaning, careless prayers.—This name should be sanctified,—in our thoughts,—words,—and actions.—The threatening implies,—that no qualification shall justify offenders,—that no excuses shall be admitted for them,—that they shall feel the weight of divine indignation.

ESSAY 65. On the Fourth Commandment.

Part I.

A seventh portion of our time is demanded for the immediate service of God. Such is the institution of the sabbath,—our obligations to which appear—from the light of nature, especially from divine revelation,—the original appointment to Adam,—the fourth commandment delivered to the Israelites,—the instructions and reproofs of the prophets,—the change of the day introduced in the new testament, and continued by the church.—The devout observance recommended from its beneficial effects, and its necessary connexion with true religion.

ESSAY 66. On the Fourth Commandment.

Part II.

The SABBATH, signifying REST, requires us to abstain from ordinary occupations,—and from common amusements.—Various excuses obviated.—The day is to be sanctified by positive duties,—in our public assemblies,—in our families,—and in retirement.

ESSAY 67. On the Fifth Commandment.

Part I.

Christians must attend to social and relative duties. This commandment stands first in the second table, as being most important for the regulation of our conduct towards our neighbour. It is addressed to children, and requires them to honour their parents, which they should do by reverence,—by submission to their instructions,—to their commands,—to their corrections,—and disposal,—and by gratitude.

ESSAY 68. On the Fifth Commandment.

Part II.

Relative duties are reciprocal. Parents therefore owe much to their children,—should provide for their temporal support,—but should be principally solicitous for their immortal souls;—and among other means to promote their salvation,—instruction,—correction,—good example,—earnest and constant prayer are indispensably necessary.

ESSAY 69. On the Fifth Commandment.

Part III.

The divine law promotes human happiness by enjoining all relative duties;—enforces the reciprocal obligations of masters and servants.—Servants should reverence their masters,—obey them in all things lawful,—shew them all good fidelity,—and act from the exalted motive of serving the Lord Christ.—Masters should choose religious servants,—be mild and reasonable in their commands and expectations,—maintain their authority for the glory of God,—and watch over the souls of their servants.

ESSAY 70. On the Fifth Commandment.

Part IV.

Different relations are appointed of God, and their appropriate duties deducible from the fifth commandment;—as

between Magistrates and Subjects,—Husbands and Wives, —Christian Ministers and their People ; and generally, between Superiors and Inferiors.—Pride is the greatest obstruction, humility the highest attainment.

ESSAY 71. On the Sixth Commandment.

Few will allow that they have broken this commandment. But consider, that it forbids, not only murder,—suicide,—duelling,—but also retaliation,—causeless and immoderate anger,—destruction of souls ; and that it requires—forgiveness of all trespasses,—meekness,—and universal benevolence.

ESSAY 72. On the Seventh Commandment.

Man is sunk into a state of carnality,—contrary to this commandment, which forbids all uncleanness,—in our actions, by adultery,—fornication,—or any other violation of chastity, —in our words,—in our thoughts and desires. For the prevention of impurity,—think of its baseness,—meditate on the presence, purity, goodness, and justice of God,—fly from all temptation,—look unto Jesus by faith and prayer.

ESSAY 73. On the Eighth Commandment.

The Lord has given and secured to men various degrees of property. His law commands them not to encroach on one another : it is therefore broken by robbery,—by oppression and exaction,—by fraud and deceit,—by covetousness,—and by extravagance. It requires restitution of dishonest gain, and the exercise of universal love.

ESSAY 74. On the Ninth Commandment.

The tongue, like every other member, is defiled with sin. To guard our neighbour's character from its attacks the ninth commandment was enacted. This is broken,—by false testi-

mony in a court of justice,—by detraction or slander,—by a suspicious temper,—by evil-speaking,—and by a willingness to hear of the faults of others.

ESSAY 75. On the Tenth Commandment.

The last commandment, more than any other, proves the divine origin and spirituality of the law.—It condemns the desire or thought of any evil against our neighbour,—forbids discontent and envy,—and requires purity of heart.

ESSAY 76. On Prayer for special Grace to keep the Commandments.

On reviewing the commandments, and under a consciousness of our depravity,—while we acknowledge our obligations to obedience,—we should confess our inability,—and fervently implore the aid of God,—his special grace,—which we must at all times call for, by diligent prayer, offered up in faith:

ESSAY 77. On the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer, delivered by Jesus Christ, was intended both as a model and as a form.—The introduction is calculated to produce love and reverence.—We address God as a FATHER, which He is by creation, and by adoption;—as OUR Father, because we should pray both for and with others;—and as being IN HEAVEN, which is the throne of his Majesty, and where Christ intercedes for us.

ESSAY 78. On the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer.

God's glory should be our first object. His NAME means himself,—any titles by which he is made known,—or any

attributes of his nature. In praying that his name may be hallowed, we desire that he may be universally known,—every where worshipped,—supremely loved and obeyed by ourselves, and by all others.

ESSAY 79. On the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer.

This properly follows the preceding. God possesses a kingdom of **POWER**, which being complete, we cannot pray that it may **COME**. He is establishing a kingdom of **GRACE**, which being in a state of progress, we pray for its advancement, by the general diffusion of the means of grace, and by the divine blessing to render those means efficacious,—and He inhabits a kingdom of **GLORY**, concerning which we should desire that the number of its members may be completed, and that we may speedily attain its enjoyment.

ESSAY 80. On the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer.

We cannot properly pray for the kingdom of God to come, unless we can add, "**THY WILL BE DONE**,"—with respect to the dispensations of his providence,—and to his precepts, both in the moral law, which is still binding,—and in the gospel, which requires men to repent,—to believe in Christ,—and to walk in holiness. This entire subjection to God should be yielded by all mankind,—"**IN EARTH**,"—"**AS IT IS IN HEAVEN**," by angels, whose obedience is perfect,—cheerful,—humble,—constant, and persevering.

ESSAY 81. On the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer.

Our bodily necessities should be represented to God. As our Lord has taught us to say, "**GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD**," we may pray and labour for whatever is needful to support life,—we should desire temporal favours with some conditions and limitations,—every day implore the divine blessing on our labours,—and seek our bread by lawful means.

ESSAY 82. On the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer.

We should approach to God, as guilty creatures, imploring pardon. Consider, what is the forgiveness we pray for :—how it is to be obtained :—how needful is the petition. But we also promise FORGIVENESS OF TRESPASSES. This is an imitation of God ;—a sense of our own unworthiness should dispose us to it ;—the love of Christ should constrain us ;—it is required as a test of our religion ;—we cannot pray without it ;—with a revengeful disposition we bind a curse upon ourselves.

ESSAY 83. On the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer.

As depraved and helpless creatures, we are taught to pray, " LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL." Consider what temptation is,—whence it proceeds,—and what reasons we have to dread it, and to pray to be preserved from it.—What is evil,—what deliverance we implore,—and how that deliverance may be obtained.

ESSAY 84. On the Conclusion of the Lord's Prayer.

We should adore and praise the Lord, as well as pray to him. What is implied in ascribing to him " THE KINGDOM,—AND THE POWER,—AND THE GLORY,—FOR EVER.—AMEN."—This conclusion contains strong reasons for praying,—is a Doxology, or an ascription of praise,—enforces the preceding petitions by urgent pleas,—is applicable to all the persons of the Trinity,—should comfort believers, and alarm the impenitent.

ESSAY 85. On the Church of Christ.

What is meant by the **CHURCH**,—the church of Christ,—militant,—holy,—catholic,—a mystical body.—A visible church established by Christ,—enlarged by his apostles;—its unity and variety;—assaulted but preserved;—in its purest state is imperfect and mixt,—Church of England commended for the apostolical order of its ministry,—the excellency of its Liturgy, its beneficial tendency and effects.—Exhortation to join its communion,—to maintain its unity,—and promote its prosperity.

ESSAY 86. On Public Worship.

The members of Christ's church should assemble together,—publicly to acknowledge their regard to God,—to offer up their praises,—to confess their sins,—to present their united prayers,—to maintain Christian fellowship,—and reverently to hear the word of God. It is a vain excuse for neglecting public worship, that many receive no profit from it,—and that further instructions are needless to those, who are acquainted with religion.

ESSAY 87. On the Christian Sacraments.

Various rites may be proper in the church.—The express appointments of Christ are unalterably binding.—What are **SACRAMENTS**.—Christ has instituted no other, but **BAPTISM** and **THE LORD'S SUPPER**.—These contain an outward and visible sign,—are significations of an inward and spiritual grace given to us,—ordained by Christ himself,—as means whereby we receive the same,—and are pledges to assure us thereof.—What obligations they lay upon us.

ESSAY 88. On Christian Baptism. Part I.

BAPTISM was appointed by Christ, as an initiatory rite,—had been practised by the Jews,—has been, and should still be, retained in the church,—is a badge of our Christian profession,—a significant emblem and public avowal of certain fundamental principles,—a federal transaction,—exhibits spiritual blessings, and is the way in which they should be sought and expected,—but should not be presumptuously depended on.

ESSAY 89. On Christian Baptism. Part II.

Controversy lamented. In Christian Baptism consider, I. The mode of administration.—Immersion, however pleaded for, is not necessary.—No certain proof of its usage.—Strong reasons for the pouring or sprinkling of water.—No particular quantity of water essential to the ordinance.—II. The proper subjects :—not only all adult converts, but the infant children of professing parents,—as may be argued from the divine institution of circumcision,—from our Lord's regard to little children,—from the practice of the apostles,—and from the general usage of the church. The propriety of admitting children to answer by proxy, and of calling them to ratify their vows by confirmation. Address to parents,—sponsors,—and young people.

ESSAY 90. On the Lord's Supper. Part I.

Christ appointed one of the sacraments to promote the spiritual progress of his people.—Why it is called THE LORD'S SUPPER.—It succeeded the Jewish passover.—When and how instituted.—It is intended to keep up the remembrance of Christ,—of his death,—of his sacrifice,—is not a repetition of that sacrifice,—does not make expiation,—is commemorative of the benefits of Christ,—intended to be perpetual. Both bread and wine should be received,—not worshipped,—do not undergo any transubstantiation,—represent the body and blood of Christ,—which are verily and indeed taken,—but only by the faithful. What is the sin of receiving unworthily,—and what its condemnation.

ESSAY 91. On the Lord's Supper. Part II.

We should be instructed to answer inquiries about this sacrament, and to shew, I. What are its advantages :—the previous preparation, and the actual participation useful ;—the divine blessing to be expected,—for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls. II. What is required of communicants: among other things, they should examine themselves,—as to their repentance for the past and purposes for the future,—as to their faith in Christ and gratitude to him,—and as to their universal benevolence or charity.

ESSAY 92. On the Resurrection of the Body.

Review of the System.—Plan of redemption will be completed by the **RESURRECTION**,—which will be a revival of the body,—of the same body,—and of the whole human race. The doctrine proved,—not from reason,—but from revelation,—from the old testament,—especially from the new. What will precede the resurrection,—the millennium,—a general apostasy,—the appearance of Christ,—the sound of the trumpet. The dead will be raised in a moment,—the living changed,—a separation made,—the world destroyed, and all mankind summoned to judgment. Objections answered. —The consolation to be derived.

ESSAY 93. On the Life everlasting.

After the resurrection a final separation of characters will be made. **THE LIFE EVERLASTING** may apply to the righteous. In what different degrees they possess this life, now,—at the hour of death,—and after the judgment. They will be delivered from all trials,—admitted to complete felicity,—and that not for a time, but for ever.—**THE LIFE EVERLASTING** may also be referred to the wicked,—whose future punishment will be not only a total privation of happiness,—but a positive infliction of consummate misery,—both on the body and the soul. Its eternity in the full sense is expressly declared. The completion of the whole system.

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

ESSAY	PAGE
1 ON the divine Origin of the Holy Scriptures - - - - -	1
2 On the different Characters of the Infidel and the Believer - - -	13
3 On the Power of God - - - - -	23
4 On the Wisdom and Knowledge of God - - - - -	40
5 On the Goodness of God - - - - -	52
6 On the Patience of God - - - - -	65
7 On the Holiness of God - - - - -	76
8 On the Justice of God - - - - -	88
9 On the Mercy of God - - - - -	103
10 On the Veracity of God - - - - -	117
11 On the Trinity in Unity - - - - -	129
12 On the Creation of Man - - - - -	143
13 On the Corruption of Man's Under- standing - - - - -	157
14 On the Depravity of the Human Will,	173
15 On Man's depraved Affections towards God - - - - -	188

ESSAY	PAGE
16 On Men's depraved Affections towards each other - - - - -	200
17 On Men's depraved Affections with respect to themselves - - - - -	215
18 On Man's Depravity in his Imagination, Judgment, Memory, and Conscience. - - - - -	228
19 On the Misery of Man as a Sinner -	241
20 On Man's State of Condemnation -	253
21 On Man's Inability to recover himself,	266
22 On Salvation by Grace alone - - -	280
23 On the Godhead of the Saviour -	299
24 On the Humiliation of the Saviour -	321
25 On the prophetical Character of Jesus Christ - - - - -	337
26 On the Example of Jesus Christ -	352
27 On the Righteousness of Jesus Christ,	369
28 On the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Part I. - - - - -	385
29 On the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Part II. - - - - -	405
30 On the Resurrection and Intercession of Jesus Christ - - - - -	424
31 On the Mediatorial Government and Second Advent of Christ - - -	438

PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON

CHRISTIANITY.

ESSAY I.

ON THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

The old and new testament contain a wonderful system,—and are authentic,—written by those, whose names they bear,—who wrought miracles,—predicted future events,—harmonized with each other,—their language and style appropriate,—their system not of human contrivance, but by its propagation, tendency, and effects, proved to be divine, and to be delivered by inspiration,

THE sacred Scriptures are not arranged in that systematical order, which uninspired writers are fond of observing. This very circumstance affords a strong presumption, that they are not the contrivance of human wisdom, at the same time that it tends to preserve uncorrupted the

grand doctrines of our faith, as they depend not on a few detached passages, which might be lost or mutilated, but are interspersed throughout, and meet us in almost every page. However, though the Bible be not drawn up with that exactness of method which we might possibly have prescribed, yet it contains a glorious plan: and it may be expedient, on some occasions at least, not to confine our attention to its separate parts, but to endeavour to digest the whole, and take a view of it, as of one compact body, though consisting of various members.

Possibly we may pay a serious regard to certain subjects in Theology, and yet with respect to others we may be superficial and desultory: or, not considering the mutual connexion and dependency of facts and doctrines, we may entertain very confused and inconsistent notions of the great scheme of Redemption. In this case, as we do not derive that degree of strength and comfort from our principles, which they are calculated to administer; we are the more exposed to the attacks of infidels, and may more easily be subverted in our belief of Christianity. It may tend, therefore, to establish our minds in the faith, and give us more clear and solid views, if we consider in a regular order the component parts of the grand system of revelation, exhibit the beauty and utility of each in its proper place, and prove the congruity and excellence of the

whole together. We propose to attempt this in the present work, by short and practical Essays on the chief doctrines and duties of our religion.

Before we proceed to state what is contained in the Bible, from which we profess to derive all our principles, it seems necessary to prove its truth and divine original: for this will produce a conviction of its importance and authority, which will ensure the most serious regard to its various subjects, as they come under our review.

The Lord God, who continually conveys instruction to mankind by the dictates of reason and conscience, and by the dispensations of his providence, was pleased also to communicate the knowledge of his will to many of his favoured servants in former ages, at some times by dreams and visions, at others in clear and explicit declarations by an audible voice from Heaven, and more frequently by the secret but powerful illumination of the Holy Ghost. We have no evidence, that He now affords any such immediate information, nor is it necessary; since the scriptures of the old and new testament are from one generation to another a full, sufficient, and decisive attestation of the mind of God. We believe that He raised up holy men, whom he commissioned and instructed by his Spirit to address the world in his name, and to make an

open and public discovery of the way of truth and righteousness. The writings of these inspired authors, who lived at different times and places, are collected into one volume which we call the Bible, and are handed down to us, under the peculiar protection of Providence, free from all such errors and corruptions as might affect any one fact or doctrine of importance.

This book must be unspeakably interesting to the whole human race. “ See that ye refuse not him that speaketh*” in it. No other book has ever yet appeared, pretending to contain a revelation from Heaven, which could stand the test of a fair and rational examination : but this will ever recommend itself to the serious and honest inquirer ; it has risen superior to every attack ; and even the most malignant opposition has tended only to illustrate its meaning, confirm its evidence, and display its excellency. It consists of two parts : the first gives the history of the Church previous to the coming of Christ, the latter describes the completion of the glorious scheme of Redemption by the predicted Saviour, and the propagation of the Gospel by his Apostles. Now, if the latter part be true and of divine origin, the first must be so ; for it is continually appealed to, and commended to our regard, not only as containing an authentic narration, but as written under the influence of the

* Heb. xii. 25.

Holy Ghost. However, therefore, there be many appropriate arguments to convince us that the old testament “ was given by inspiration of God,” it may be sufficient to prove that the new is so.

It is confessed that these Scriptures are of ancient date ; and indeed they may be traced up by historical testimony very nearly to the times of the Apostles. There cannot, then, be any reasonable doubt, but that they were written by the persons whose names they bear. For if they be said to be a forgery, we ask, at what time could they be imposed upon the world without an almost absolute certainty of being detected ? And if those men, to whom we ascribe them, were the real authors, what should induce them to give a false account ? They knew that they had nothing to expect but contempt and hatred, imprisonment and death : yet they continued steadfast amidst the severest reproaches and menaces, under racks and tortures, and not one witness of the leading facts of the Gospel ever varied in his testimony.

The principal persons concerned in the first propagation of the Gospel (among whom we include most, if not all, of these sacred penmen) were invested with various miraculous powers. They healed the most inveterate diseases by a word or a touch, and even raised the dead. Their works, then, were a decided attestation of

their doctrines. Inasmuch as the laws of nature were suspended or changed, which could not be but by the operation of the God of nature, it appeared indubitably, that “the hand of the Lord was with them;” and He, the God of truth, could never set his seal to confirm a lie.

Both in the old and new testament many prophecies of future events were delivered. These events were distant and most improbable, when predicted, but have since taken place with a minute exactness; and therefore these also are like the seal of God upon the Book. The several captivities of the ancient Jews and their subsequent restoration; the destruction of Babylon, of Egypt, Nineveh, Tyre, and Sidon; the entire desolation of Jerusalem by the Romans; the present dispersion and obduracy of the Jews; the propagation of the Gospel through the heathen world; the power of Antichrist, and the corruptions of the Church; these stand as so many undeniable proofs, that the sacred penmen were guided by supernatural assistance, and wrote “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost *.” For Jehovah claims it as his own peculiar prerogative to unfold futurity to our view, and asks, “Who hath declared this from ancient time? Who hath told it from that time? Have not I, the Lord †?”

The authors of the several parts of the Bible

* 2 Pet. i. 21. † Isa. xlv. 21.

lived at different times, and were men of different habits. It is not possible that they could have consulted together, to fabricate such a history, and compile such a system, as they have published. But they are perfectly agreed together: they possessed the same sentiments, they pursued the same plan. This exact harmony, this consistency and unity of design, is just what we might have expected from writers divinely inspired; but, on the supposition that they had no extraordinary communications from Heaven, it is wonderful, it is unparalleled, and unaccountable.

Their language and style are in many respects appropriate. If we compare them with the most admired compositions of Greece or Rome, they will appear to possess a decided superiority, a beauty and an excellency no where else to be found. What can equal the simplicity of their narrations? Where is there any thing like the sublimity and grandeur of their descriptions of the majesty, the works, and perfections of Jehovah? These descriptions are more than human: they are the declarations of God himself.

The scheme of revelation is very different from what any impostors would have contrived. It evidently required Almighty power to bring it into effect; and the facts related are such, that if the whole had been a falsehood, it not only might, but would certainly, have been soon de-

tected. The doctrines and principles also inculcated in the sacred writings were so repugnant to men's natural propensities and worldly interests, so humbling and so holy, that they appear at once to be of divine origin. Nothing could have been more wild and ridiculous, than that such men as the Apostles, without authority, influence, eloquence, or learning, should set out upon the plan of converting the world to a religion, which they knew to be despised and hated, which struck at the root and required the renunciation of all other systems, and which enjoined a constant opposition to the strongest affections of our nature, if they had not been firmly persuaded that they were commissioned, and would certainly be supported, by the God of Heaven. Their consequent success proves that they were not mistaken. The propagation of the Gospel by such instruments, in defiance of all the resistance which power, prejudice, or philosophy could raise against them, and the continuance of this religion to the present day, is an irrefragable demonstration, that Jehovah himself hath revealed and protected it. No other supposition, at least, can reasonably account for these effects.

The Bible contains an internal evidence, which proves it to be "given by inspiration of God." It raises the mind to the most sublime

conceptions, and enjoins the most pure and spiritual worship of God. It is the only book, which describes the misery of our present lapsed condition, exactly as we experience it, and, while it assigns the true cause, proposes an effectual cure for the malady we have derived from the fall. It disperses the fears of a guilty conscience; it brings the gracious offer of reconciliation with God, and introduces the believer into a state of favour and communion with Him. Its manifest tendency is to meliorate and exalt human nature, to subdue its corruptions, and implant all holy principles and affections. It commands, it produces, an abhorrence of evil; it inculcates and inspires the love of righteousness. Wherever its influence prevails, it renders the soul superior to the temptations of the world, and opens to its view the blissful prospect of a glorious immortality. Who will hesitate to say, that this cannot be the contrivance of fools and deceivers, but that it proceeds from infinite wisdom, and is decidedly the manifestation of an almighty, merciful, and holy God?

We might appeal to “a cloud of witnesses,” both ancient and modern. There are innumerable instances of those, who in consequence of this book have been delivered from unspeakable anguish and horror, and have been established in peace, confidence, and joy. We can produce thousands, who have been turned by it from

habits and dispositions the most vile and abominable to the love and practice of every thing amiable, excellent, and useful. What is the general character of those, who are most zealously attached to Revelation? and what of the persons who hate and reject it? Will not the very striking contrast between the two sorts afford a strong presumption, that our religion descends from Heaven? On this ground we do not wonder, that the enemy of all righteousness will not cease to vilify and resist it; because it frustrates his purposes, and tends to subvert his kingdom upon the earth.

Allowing, then, the truth and inspiration of the holy Scriptures, we should be solicitous to treat them with all that serious regard, to which they are entitled as “the word of God.”

1. Let us take pains to understand them. It will be unpardonable to be indifferent about them; for that would imply a contempt of their divine Author, as if we cared not for his favour, and defied his anger. Nor should we be discouraged by the difficulties, which may obstruct our progress in the study of these sacred records. The benefits to be derived will amply compensate our diligence: inasmuch as they are our life; our eternal ALL depends upon them. Yet alas! while every trifle can attract the notice and engage the pursuits of men, how few seem to labour, and persevere in their endeavours,

to attain the right knowledge of even “the first principles of the oracles of God!”

2. Let us study them with reverence. They are not designed to gratify an idle curiosity, nor are they calculated to satisfy the presumptuous inquiries of a speculative mind. We should repress our levity and our vain cavillings, by reflecting that they are “a message from God unto us” on subjects of unspeakable importance. Then only we shall be prepared to give them all due attention, when we are deeply impressed with a sense of the majesty, power, holiness, and goodness of Him, who speaks to us from Heaven, and are anxious to secure His “loving-kindness, which is better than life.”

3. Let us pray for a spiritual illumination. We shall stand in need of all the exertions of our intellectual abilities, and our Reason must be diligently employed not only to judge of the evidence, but also to investigate the true sense of the Scriptures. But let not Reason presume to decide upon the mysteries of our faith, as if it might reject what it cannot fully comprehend. Let us be apprized of its defects, and beware of the corrupt affections of our minds, which might lead us to false conclusions. Under this conviction let us humbly implore some portion of that Holy Spirit, which rested upon the sacred writers, that we may be assisted in our researches,

and “guided into all truth.” Otherwise, it is probable, that we shall “grope as if we had no eyes, and stumble at noon-day, as in the night;” we shall not only overlook, but dislike and oppose some of the grand and essential principles of our religion.

4. Let us be afraid of setting up our own preconceived opinions or carnal inclinations against the Bible. If it be indeed the word of the living God, it is an infallible and authoritative umpire in all doubts and disputations. We should therefore implicitly submit to its decisions, and bring all our systems, creeds, and purposes, to be examined and regulated by it. Without such an entire subjection of the understanding and the will to the dictates of revelation, we certainly “refuse Him that speaketh:” and how great must be the folly, guilt, and danger of such a conduct! Soon He will speak to us in a different way. His voice will shake the Heavens, will raise the dead, will summon the whole human species to his tribunal, and adjudge to all their proper and everlasting portion. Who will refuse to obey his summons, or controvert his sentence? May we be prepared to meet him, and then with unutterable raptures we shall hear him pronounce those gracious words, “ENTER YE INTO THE JOY OF YOUR LORD.”

Amen.

ESSAY II.

ON THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERS OF THE INFIDEL AND THE BELIEVER.

The word of God is denominated “light,”—rejected by those only, who do evil,—who hate the light—and who fear conviction—but is valued by those, who possess integrity,—who do not shun but court the examination of the light,—and whose deeds are wrought in God.

THE divine inspiration of the holy Scriptures being proved, we may proceed, under a full conviction of their truth, to build upon them our theological system, and vindicate its several doctrines by arguments derived from their infallible declarations. We shall need no other evidence in support of any religious sentiment or position than a plain and incontrovertible text : with such a voucher, we may advance with confidence, and speak as with authority, “Thus saith THE LORD.”

But before we enter upon a minute investigation of their most important contents, let us consider what dispositions of mind are requisite, in order to reap any advantage from the study. What sort of tempers and principles are previously necessary ? Who are the persons, who will receive, or who will reject, the testimony of

the Bible? On whom will it produce its proper effect? Or why does it so often fail of accomplishing its end? We are resolved in these inquiries by “the faithful and true witness,” who has declared, “Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved: but he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God*.” From this passage we shall take occasion to remark the nature, cause, and sinfulness of unbelief; and we shall perceive on what grounds and for what reasons men refuse to submit to the decisions of revelation, and turn away from it with disgust. At the same time that the infidel thus appears in odious colours, we shall see a striking contrast exhibited in the beautiful simplicity, integrity, and ingenuousness of the real believer. Let us search and try our own characters, and pray that every wrong affection, which would be an impediment to our reception of the truth, may be subdued in our minds.

The word of God may properly be denominated “LIGHT;” for without it we must have remained in the most profound darkness, respecting many questions of the greatest importance to our peace. “Whatsoever doth make manifest is Light†;” and therefore this is properly so termed, because it brings to view, what reason in its most improved state never would have dis-

* John iii. 20, 21.

† Eph. v. 13.

covered, the righteous character of God, the full extent of our duty, and the awful consequences of transgression, the possibility of final forgiveness, the way of reconciliation through a Mediator, and the certainty of a future state. Upon these and other points connected with them we might speculate and conjecture, but without revelation we should “grope in the dark.” How thankful then should we be, that “the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth *!” Yet the light, which breaks forth upon us from this source, meets not with an universal welcome. Many are unwilling to admit it, and with a determined obstinacy shut their eyes against it. Is this what we can account for? Yes: our Lord assigns the real cause, though few would be forward to avow it: “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil†.” On this ground he describes the character of the Infidel.

1. “He doeth evil.” This, indeed, may be asserted of every man by nature: but the confirmed infidel is one, who pertinaciously refuses to relinquish his corrupt principles and practices, and against clear information and strong reproof resolves to persist in them, in defiance of all consequences. If he were otherwise disposed, sincerely desirous of knowing and doing the will of God, we are assured that he would not be left

* 1 John ii. 8. † John iii. 19.

to embrace and maintain such pernicious errors *. Possibly, his external deportment may be regular, fair, and plausible; he may not be chargeable with the gross vices of intemperance and sensuality, with injustice or profaneness. But in many other ways he may still “do evil:” he may indulge the most vile affections: and we scruple not to affirm, that a proud philosopher is as hateful a character as a drunkard or extortioner. It might be sufficient then to state, that the love of sin prevails in his heart; for that must bias his conclusions, and of itself would justify his condemnation. Supposing then a character of this kind; one, “who doeth evil” habitually, and, as being destitute of right principles, doeth nothing but evil; what we affirm is, that such an one must be inclined to be an unbeliever, even previous to his examination of the Scriptures. He will proceed with strong prejudices to investigate a system, the grand object of which is the promotion of holiness. It follows therefore, as it were naturally,

2. “He hateth the light.” It is offensive to him, and must be so on account of his vitiated mind. The discoveries which it makes are such as he must turn away from with disgust and horror; for they are all calculated to disclose, what he cannot bear to contemplate, his deformity and danger. He can never relish, and

* John vii. 17.

therefore he is disposed to reject, the scripture testimony of God's righteous character, or of the extensive demands and awful sanctions of his holy law. Equally averse he will be to the only method of salvation revealed in the Gospel, because it mortifies his pride, and strikes at the root of all his sinful propensities. Even the blessedness of Heaven, which is described as consisting in perfect purity and in the unceasing admiration and enjoyment of God, comports not with his wishes, and excites in him no desires for its attainment. How will such a man argue upon the subject? From the very state of his mind he must be an enemy to the whole plan; and we wonder not that he labours for its subversion, and determines upon its rejection. But he is an unfair, and therefore an incompetent, judge. Whatever he may pretend, he is dishonest; and his unbelief arises not from want of evidence, but want of sincerity.

3. "He cometh not to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd." He will endeavour to avoid it through fear or disgust. He may indeed speculate about the Bible, or attend in a formal, hypocritical manner, where it is faithfully preached: but he does not bring himself fairly to the test. He dares not challenge a close examination; but, if called to it, he shrinks, as one who is not willing that his wound should be probed,

or his accounts minutely searched. A consciousness of his bad principles and practices, and a secret apprehension of being detected and exposed, while yet he determines to persist in a wrong course, will furnish his mind with many objections against divine truth. The proud and haughty scorner, the ambitious and revengeful, the covetous, the sensual, the unjust and profane, will all be equally averse to the admission of that light, which will discover their baseness, and shew them on what a tremendous precipice they stand.

Thus, as our Lord describes, the wilful and impenitent transgressor is disposed to be an unbeliever ; and his infidelity, by whatever specious arguments it is defended, arises from the love of sin. We ask then, of those who dislike and wish to reject the peculiar doctrines and precepts of the Gospel, May not your objections be traced up to this source ? And is this what you will justify ? Does not this very circumstance demonstrate the excellency of the Scriptures, that nothing prevents your entire approbation of them, but your inward and confirmed depravity ? While you refuse “ to put away the evil of your doings,” you cannot love them or even give them a fair examination. You must not wonder, then, that on such a subject we listen to your disquisitions with much caution and suspicion.

But though the book of inspiration may be treated by many with neglect and contempt, to some it is inestimably precious: and we are bold to affirm, on the authority of our Lord, that if any man set himself seriously to study it with an humble and an honest heart, he will readily and thankfully bow to its decisions. The character is here drawn by One who cannot be deceived: “He doeth truth; he cometh to the light; that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” Let every reader inquire, Is this my own case?

1. “He doeth truth.” This is the distinguishing mark of a sincere inquirer under the influence of divine grace. For every man is naturally disposed to deal treacherously with himself and with God, the human heart being “deceitful above all things *;” so that it is no small attainment to be stripped of all disguise, and possess real integrity. Such was the character of Nathanael, “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile †:” such is the character of every one, “unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity ‡.” He disdains to act a part as a dissembler, and is fair and open in his professions and transactions, both with his fellow-creatures, and with God. While, therefore, he prays for instruction, he will most unfeignedly desire to be taught, will endeavour to lay aside his prejudices, and be ready to receive implicitly,

* Jer. xvii. 9. † John i. 47. ‡ Psalm xxxii. 2.

and perfectly acquiesce in, the decisions of Heaven, however contrary to his own former systems. This is the temper of mind we should all possess ; and it is easy to perceive that it will lead to the best consequences.

2. “ He cometh to the light.” Being truly solicitous to obtain information in his spiritual concerns, he will use all proper means for that purpose, and in his humble and pious researches he will be happily freed from those difficulties and obstructions, which prevent or retard the progress of others. With gratitude and joy he receives the assurance, that “ light is come into the world,” by a divine revelation ; and being convinced by its evidence, he will instantly apply to it for direction, and with diligent and impartial attention examine its contents. Its faithful declarations, which he will read and hear with avidity, may strike against many previous prejudices, arising from the natural ignorance and depravity of the human mind ; but from their influence he will soon be delivered. His former creeds, principles, and practices, he will submit to this high and sovereign arbiter, and abide by its infallible decisions. Such an one may be astonished by a clear view of the doctrines of the Bible, concerning the holy nature of God, the extensive demands and tremendous sanctions of his righteous law, the mysterious methods of his grace in the redemption of mankind, and our future state of

existence in eternal happiness or misery ; but he will not turn away from the view with disgust or indifference. He will not cease to contemplate these wondrous truths till his whole soul be penetrated by them, and feel their full import.

3. He wishes to know himself, and to have his conduct sifted to the bottom. His object is, “ that his deeds may be made manifest ;” not from any ostentatious views to display his religion, but from a cordial desire to understand for himself, and prove to the world, his real state and character. If he be right, a partaker of divine grace, then it will appear, that “ his deeds are wrought in God.” This is the point to be examined : Are they so wrought ?

1. With respect to the end and motive : Are they performed in obedience to the will of God, and with a view to his glory, from a deep sense of inexpressible obligations to Him, and of His infinite excellence ? Where He is not supremely regarded, no line of conduct can be pleasing to Him, “ by whom actions are weighed ;” for He requires, not a mere external service, but the warmest affections of our hearts, and the entire subjection of our whole souls to himself.

2. With respect to the influence under which they are performed : Man, it will appear, is morally depraved and helpless : all, therefore, that is truly good in him, is not to be ascribed to any wisdom, strength, or virtue of his own, but to the

efficacy of that grace which is promised “to work in us both to will and to do.” This heavenly aid we must implore, and depend upon. It is the high privilege of all those, who are brought into a state of reconciliation and union with God. They are “zealous of good works,” but their works “are wrought IN GOD :” and the sincere convert is anxious to possess this decided evidence in his own favour.

To one of such a description the Bible is unspeakably precious, since it exhibits what is his true condition, what the foundation and security of his hopes. The more upright, devout, and holy any man is, the greater value he will put upon the sacred volume; and in the same proportion it will improve and display his character. A consideration this, which in a striking manner shews its excellency, and the advantage of studying it. What thanks are due to Him, who hath bestowed upon us so inestimable a blessing! And what vigilance and caution are requisite on our part, that no remissness or perverseness of disposition may prevent its proper influence, or provoke our God to deprive us of so high a privilege! Let us attend to the warning of our heavenly monitor, “Yet a little while is the light with you: walk, while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you *!”

* John xii. 35.

ESSAY III.

ON THE POWER OF GOD.

The existence of God appears from the light of nature, as do many of his attributes. Yet these are better learnt from the scriptures; where it is proved, that he possesses unlimited power,—from his works of creation,—from his providence,—from the government which he exerciseth,—and from the operations of his grace.

IN searching the holy scriptures, our first object should be to understand the character of its Author. Who is the speaker? What his nature and perfections? On these points we may expect clear and satisfactory information: the Lord God has made himself known to us.

We do not produce the Bible to prove that there is a God; that is sufficiently established by reason and the light of nature; and it is here taken for granted, as an obvious and generally acknowledged truth. Some of his attributes also are demonstrable by arguments derived from the same source: they are evident from what we see around us, and experience within us. “The invisible things of him from the creation of the

world are clearly seen *.” Yet even these may be learned in a better manner from the sacred oracles: and from their infallible testimony it may be useful to select certain parts of the divine character for serious consideration, with the view, not so much of proposing any critical explanations, as of obtaining a more affecting and practical sense of them.

We presume not even to enumerate all the perfections of Jehovah, or to give a full and adequate idea of any one. Our notions of Him, who is infinite and eternal, are very limited and obscure; and must be so from the scantiness of our minds: “we cannot order our speech, by reason of darkness.” But a little may be said: enough to excite increasing reverence, submission, love, and admiration towards this great and incomprehensible Being. Let us proceed with caution to the discussion of so high a subject, under a consciousness of the weakness of our intellect and the depravity of our nature, which might unfit us for the study, or lead us to false conclusions. Let us guard against those foolish imaginations, which represent the Deity as like unto ourselves; and let us lift up our prayer that we may be favoured with the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, which are peculiarly needful in these momentous inquiries.

* Rom. i. 20.

We begin with considering THE POWER OF GOD : and we have only to trace the effects of his agency, in order to be convinced that He possesseth this attribute in a measure which must exceed our most exalted conceptions. The subject may, at first view, appear trite and uninteresting ; but it is far otherwise. Our attention is directed to it in the sacred scriptures with the most impressive solemnity ; and we shall find the firm belief and practical application of it highly advantageous, and essentially requisite in religion. How sublime and animated are the descriptions given ! Let us study them till we be properly and deeply affected with them. “ Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord’s thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible *.” “ Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty : for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine : thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all, and in thine hand is power and might, and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all †.” “ Shall not his excellency make you afraid, and his dread fall upon

* Deut. x. 14—17.

† 1 Chron. xxix. 11, 12.

you?" "Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?"

"He thundereth with the voice of his excellency. God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth He, which we cannot comprehend. With God is terrible majesty. Touching the Almighty we cannot find him out; He is excellent in power." "Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like Him*?" "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand."

"The Lord reigneth: He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength, where-with He hath girded himself: the world also is established, that it cannot be moved. Thy throne is established of old; thou art from everlasting."

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable†." "All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him? Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names, by the greatness of

* Job xiii. 11. xxvi. 14. xxxvii. 4, 5, 22, 23. xl. 9.

† Psalm lxxxix. 8, 13. xciii. 1, 2. cxlv. 3.

his might ; for that he is strong in power, not one faileth *.” “ Who would not fear thee, O King of nations ? Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord, thou art great, and thy name is great in might †.” “ He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth : and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou ‡ ?” “ For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things : to whom be glory for ever. Amen §.”

We are here taught to look from the effects, which are every where obvious, to the invisible great cause of all. We perceive an astonishing display of power, to which no limits can be assigned. We say therefore that God is OMNIPOTENT : but we know not how much is implied in the term. He cannot be controlled by any thing without, nor can He possess any internal defect. His word, his very will, is so efficacious, that his purposes must invariably take place : nor can we conceive of any thing so great, but what He is able to produce. He cannot indeed perform what would involve a contradiction, for that would be no object of power : nor can any thing, which would imply moral weakness or mutability, be ascribed to Him ; “ He cannot lie,” “ He cannot deny himself ¶.”

* Isaiah xl. 17, 18, 26. † Jer. x. 6, 7. ‡ Daniel iv. 35.

§ Rom. xi. 36. ¶ Titus i. 2. 2 Tim. ii. 13.

Let us contemplate the indubitable proofs of this power, and its wonderful energy,

1. In the works of creation. These will open to us a large field for speculation. How extensive and complicated the system of things in which we find ourselves to be placed ! How amazing the number and variety of creatures, above, below, and every where around us ! The terraqueous globe itself, which we inhabit ; how immense in its size ; how richly and magnificently furnished ! Each animal exhibits a system of workmanship so exquisite, as even to baffle our comprehension : and we are at a loss to say which most displays the mighty agency of the divine Artificer, the magnitude of some, or the minuteness of others. If we fix our regard on ourselves, and contemplate the mechanism of the body, or the faculties of the mind, surely we must allow that “ we are fearfully and wonderfully made * ;” nor can we want any further proofs of almighty power. If we extend our view to other worlds, to the bright luminary of heaven, and all the planetary orbs performing their constant and harmonious revolutions ; if we indulge our thoughts in a still wider range, and pass from star to star through the immensity of space, we must be filled with admiration of the strength and energy of that hand, which formed all things

* Psalm cxxxix. 14.

as they are, and which, as it should seem, could have formed them in ten thousand different ways.

The very act of creation, or the producing of any being out of nothing, gives us the most enlarged ideas of OMNIPOTENCE. When we remark also, that this was done with so much ease, and, as it were, by an instantaneous exertion, by a word, or a mere simple volition, we are constrained to say, that “power,” without any limit or imperfection, “belongeth unto God *,” and that “with Him nothing shall be impossible †.” “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For He spake, and it was done: He commanded, and it stood fast ‡.”

2. In his constant and universal providence. We are assured that his care extends to the minutest circumstance of our lives, and to the smallest and most insignificant animal. His mighty energy is continually put forth and displayed in the preservation of the worlds, and the support of all the creatures which he has made. All things would be thrown into confusion, and revert to their original chaos, or rather, sink into a state of annihilation, if the Lord God Almighty did not every moment watch over and sustain every part of the universe. There is no power or efficacy in any created being, but what de-

* Psalm lxii. 11. † Luke i. 37. ‡ Psalm xxxiii. 6, 9.

pend upon His communications and continual agency. The regular motions of the heavenly bodies, all preserved in their place and order from age to age; the constant succession of the seasons; the fruitfulness of the earth, producing in rich abundance the means of support to all the various tribes of animals; and the continued propagation of those animals in distinct species; these are effects which lie open to our view, and which we cannot otherwise account for, than on the supposition of an Almighty Providence incessantly superintending, sustaining, and actuating the whole creation. If the laws of nature are resorted to for an explanation of these things, we ask, what are these laws but the regular methods by which God is pleased to act? We admire His goodness and wisdom in them, but we ascribe all their efficacy to His agency; and instead of speaking of the operations of NATURE, we should rather speak of the operations of THE GOD OF NATURE.

Thus the scriptures teach us; “He upholdeth all things by the word of his power *;” for “by Him all things consist †,” and therefore “they continue this day according to his ordinances, for all are his servants ‡.” “He crowneth the year with his goodness §.” “The eyes of all wait

* Heb. i. 3.

† Col. i. 17.

‡ Psalm cxix. 91.

§ Psalm lxxv. 11.

upon him ; and he giveth them their meat in due season. He openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing *.” “ That he giveth them, they gather: he openeth his hand, they are filled with good. He hideth his face, they are troubled ; he taketh away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. He sendeth forth his Spirit, they are created ; and he reneweth the face of the earth †.” “ In him we live, and move, and have our being ‡.” “ In his hands our breath is, and his are all our ways §.” “ Not a sparrow is forgotten before God :” and with him “ even the very hairs of our head are all numbered ¶.” All these descriptions imply an energy of power, equal to that which is manifested in creation. It surpasses all our conceptions, and from such a view of the subject, who can but exclaim, “ Is any thing too hard for the Lord ¶ ?” We remark the same

3. In the government which he exercises over all. No event is fortuitous, no creature is left to its own disposal. There is, indeed, a seeming confusion in the course of human affairs ; and many occurrences may properly be called casual, in this sense, that we cannot calculate upon them beforehand, that they depend upon something altogether out of our view or conjecture, and are

* Psalm cxlv. 15, 16.

† Acts xvii. 28.

‡ Luke xii. 6, 7.

† Psalm civ. 28—30.

§ Daniel v. 23.

¶ Gen. xviii. 14.

beyond the power and direction of second agents. But reason as well as scripture proclaims, that “the kingdom is the Lord’s: and he is the Governor among the nations*.” “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all†.” “Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places‡.” “He ruleth by his power for ever: let not the rebellious exalt themselves§.” “The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up||.” He saith, “I will work, and who shall let it? My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure¶.”

What a view does this give us of the greatness of his majesty, and the immensity of his power! How amazing the divine administration! Not a creature, animate or inanimate, but what is subject to his governance, and receives its designation from him: not an event or revolution, but what forms a part of his plan, and has an infallible tendency, by his overruling influence, to accomplish his purposes! If he be pleased in general to work by what are called settled rules, yet these do not necessarily bind his conduct; he can suspend or alter them, and he has often done so in

* Psalm xxii. 28. † ciii. 19. ‡ cxxxv. 6. § lxvi. 7.

|| 1 Sam. ii. 6, 7. ¶ Isaiah xliii. 13. xlv. 10.

the natural world, for the clearer manifestation of his own attributes. What so striking a proof of his omnipotence, as the miraculous acts which He has performed? Is it competent to a being of finite strength to break up the fountains of the great deep, and to open the windows of heaven, to bring a flood of waters upon the earth, and to destroy all flesh? The mighty and wonderful deeds which the Lord wrought in the sight of Pharaoh, and the destruction of that haughty tyrant in the red sea, while the same waters afforded a security to the Israelites; the guidance, support, and protection of his chosen people through the wilderness by a continued series of miracles, all evince that “in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength *.”

Opposition to his counsels is vain. The hearts of his mightiest and most malignant enemies are in his hands: “He turneth them whithersoever he will †.” He can subdue or destroy them, as He has done in innumerable instances; or in a moment confound and change their purposes. They may be permitted to prosper for a time, and to triumph in their wickedness; but their very resistance displays the greatness of his strength. At length they must yield to his sovereign will, and even, by all their efforts to the contrary, subserve his designs. “They do whatsoever his

* Isaiah xxvi. 4.

† Prov. xxi. 1.

hand and his counsel determined before to be done *.” The means also, which he frequently makes use of in the execution of his own plans, and the destruction of his adversaries, are such as plainly shew “ that the excellency of the power is of Him †.” They are of themselves inadequate and contemptible : but “ his strength is made perfect in weakness ‡ ;” and “ it is no restraint to him, to save by many or by few §.” “ Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty ! Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name || ?”

It may seem to anticipate the subject of some succeeding Essays, and yet this is a suitable occasion to remark, that the mighty agency of God appears

4. In his work of redemption, and the operations of his grace. This is the work which his word celebrates more than any other, and by which chiefly he considers himself to be glorified. Thus he speaks, “ Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it : shout, ye lower parts of the earth : break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein : for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel ¶.” The whole plan is such as exhibits the interposition of almighty power, as well as boundless

* Acts iv. 28. † 2 Cor. iv. 7. ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 9.
§ 1 Sam. xiv. 6. || Rev. xv. 3. ¶ Isa. xlv. 23.

race. The strength of all created beings would have been inadequate to the execution. "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him*." The Redeemer is accordingly called "the power of God," and the gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth †."

"God was in Christ," as appeared in the whole scheme of his mediation. His immaculate conception, and mysterious incarnation, his protection from enemies, his unparalleled miracles, his support under suffering, and his resurrection from the dead, gave an astonishing exhibition to the world of what omnipotence can effect, and "declared him to be the Son of God with power ‡."

By the same invincible agency the gospel was propagated, and triumphed over the idolatry and wickedness of the world. Its continuance and efficacy to the present day, demonstrate that it is "the rod of God's strength;" since the people who receive it are made willing "in the day of his power §." The conversion of a sinner to God, and to the obedience of faith, is a change which is to be produced only by the energy of the Holy Ghost; and it is not inferior to any act of

* Isaiah lix. 16. † 1 Cor. i. 24. Rom. i. 16.

‡ Rom. i. 4.

§ Psalm cx. 2, 3.

omnipotence. It is a new creation, a spiritual birth, a resurrection from the dead. How wonderful the exertions and the triumphs of grace ! This can soon reconcile the most rebellious, soften the most obdurate, and sanctify the most polluted heart. The men, who are thus marvellously rescued from sin and Satan, are conducted by the same mighty hand through innumerable conflicts, dangers, and distresses. “ They are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation * ;” and the final completion of their bliss, when they shall be crowned with victory over all their enemies, will prove incontestably, that “ their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is his name † .”

The practical inferences to be drawn from the subject are various and important.

1. Let us reverence this great and glorious Being. We should never even think of the divine Majesty, but with the most profound awe : and if we are encouraged to approach him in his own instituted ordinances, we should draw nigh with deepest humiliation and lowliness of mind, remembering our infinite distance from him, our impotence, and insignificance. To all his dispensations and appointments we should yield an unreserved submission : and from regard to his sovereign and uncontrollable authority, we should say, when he appears in his providence to con-

* 1 Pet. i. 5.

† Jer. l. 34.

tend with us, “ It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good *.”

2. Let us learn to trust ourselves in his hands. If omnipotence itself be engaged on our side, what have we to fear? Be this our grand object, to secure his protection and care over us: for then in all dangers and necessities we may possess tranquillity and fortitude. We shall dwell in safety we shall obtain relief. It is dishonourable, that we should doubt of his sufficiency, or be unwilling to maintain a firm dependence upon him for all we may want, either temporal or spiritual. “ The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof † :” and “ He shall supply all our need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus ‡ .”

3. We should praise him for this perfection of his nature. The angels do it; and thus we are enjoined; “ Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in the firmament of his power; praise him for his mighty acts; praise him according to his excellent greatness § .” While we look on the creation around us in the spirit of devout contemplation, every object will excite our admiration of the divine power. Has not this power been wonderfully displayed towards ourselves? Undoubtedly it has, in the constant protection and support, and in the frequent marvellous deli-

* 1 Sam. iii. 18.

† Psalm xxiv. 1.

‡ Phil. iv. 19.

§ Psalm cl. 1, 2.

verances we have experienced. Has it been so in our spiritual concerns? Are we rescued from the tyranny of Satan, and renewed in the spirit of our minds? Have we been preserved in righteousness and peace, and favoured with any measure of usefulness in the church? Let us say, "Thou, Lord, hast done it!" And, "Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end *." But,

4. The displeasure of this Almighty Being is justly to be dreaded. Who shall dare to contend with him? For "who knoweth the power of his anger †?" Impenitent sinners seem not to be aware, how entirely they are in the hands of the Lord God Omnipotent, whose wrath they are wantonly provoking. Will not this subject arrest your attention? O consider, He, with whom you strive, can in a moment destroy all your comforts here, and render you a burden and a terror to yourselves. He can do more: He can pursue you with his vengeance beyond the grave. O "fear him, who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell ‡." There will his power be known, in its most tremendous effects. O seek deliver-

* Eph. iii. 20, 21.

† Psalm xc, 11,

‡ Matthew x. 28,

ance "from the wrath to come!" Receive the gospel, and implore the mighty energy of his Spirit; and so will you ascribe unto him the "kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever." Amen.

ESSAY IV.

ON THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

The infinite understanding of God, his wisdom, and knowledge, are manifest from the works which he hath made,—from his providence and government,—from the plan of redemption,—and the methods of his grace.

VARIOUS are the attributes of God, which claim our devout regard. His operations, as we have seen, demonstrate the greatness of his POWER: and it is equally evident from the same sources of information, that his UNDERSTANDING is infinite. He must possess a comprehension of intellect extended as the universe, nay, boundless as himself. All his own perfections must lie open to his view; he must at once perceive all the creatures of his hand, exactly as they are, in their respective natures, circumstances, connexions, and dependencies; no event can happen without his privity; no thought arise, or design be formed even in the mind of any intelligent being, but he sees it in all its tendencies, and it was always equally the object of his intuition. Such is the knowledge we ascribe unto God; but “it is

too wonderful for us ; it is high, we cannot attain unto it *.”

We are taught to believe likewise, that such is the extent and excellence of his intellect, he not only knows all things, which are or may be done, but he so perceives the relations of things one to another, and their mutual bearings and effects, that he can never be mistaken in the use of any means. He discerns with certainty their fitness or unfitness for his various purposes ; and therefore all his energies are directed in the best manner, to the best ends and purposes. This is what we mean by wisdom, and it forms an essential requisite in our notion of the Deity. All his plans and operations are so conducted, as to shew not merely invincible strength, but the vast and infinite comprehension of his mind. He is “ the only wise God † ; ” “ wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working ‡ . ”

Let us investigate these attributes in the same way we did his power, as manifested both in his works and word. Here again we shall find much matter for devout admiration, rather than for curious research and critical explanation. Enough will appear to call forth the Apostle’s exclamation, “ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out || ! ”

* Psal, cxxxix. 6. † Jude 25. ‡ Isa. xxviii. 29.

|| Rom. xi. 33.

Here is a profound abyss, which we cannot fathom, and treasures, more than we can ever explore. But let us adore what we cannot comprehend, and presume not to measure the perfections of an infinite Being by our limited conceptions. May he compassionate our ignorance, and illuminate our darkened minds with the knowledge of himself, as far as we are capable of admitting so glorious a light!

1. The amazing extent and excellence of the divine understanding are exhibited in every part of the creation. This is indeed a boundless subject: but those who survey the wondrous fabric, though superficially, cannot but observe in its formation an intelligence far exceeding the utmost stretch of the human mind. What curious arrangement! What beautiful order! What astonishing mechanism, and contrivance! What consummate skill, both in the plan and execution! Whether we view the system together, as one great whole, or examine the parts in detail, the least as well as the greatest, our conclusion will be the same: All is wonderful, and surpasses comprehension. Especially, our own mental faculties, the vast powers of the human soul, thought, reason, imagination, memory, will and affections; these are among the clearest proofs, and give us the most enlarged conceptions, of the omniscience of God. “He that teacheth man

knowledge, shall not he know * ?” He must possess every excellence which he communicates to his creatures, and possess it without their imperfections and limitations.

“ O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all † .” “ The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth ; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew ‡ .” “ He hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion § .” “ His work is perfect || .” “ He hath made every thing beautiful in his time : nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it ¶ .”

2. The providence and government of God demonstrate that his understanding is infinite. He ruleth by his wisdom, as well as by his power. He has been pursuing one uniform design from the beginning, and by means best adapted to his purpose. Evil indeed is permitted ; but, by his almighty influence, good is educed. There is a mysteriousness in his plan, which we presume not to explain : it must be too big for our contracted minds to comprehend. Many parts of it are not submitted to our examination ; and of those we do see we are not perfect judges, because they are not yet completed.

* Psal. xciv. 10. † Psal. civ. 24. ‡ Prov. iii. 19, 20.

§ Jer. x. 12. || Deut. xxxii. 4. ¶ Eccles. iii. 11, 14.

But we understand enough of his dispensations, to admire the wisdom by which they are conducted; and what appears dark to us, we dare not censure, on account of our own ignorance. Who shall pretend to take the reins of government out of his hands? "Shall any teach God knowledge?" "Who hath directed his Spirit? or being his counsellor hath taught him *?"

All things are under his notice, exposed to his view, and regulated by his unremitting care. Now, what an amazing intelligence is this, which can overlook the universe, preserve order in every part, attend to the necessities of the minutest creature, and make suitable provision for all! How soon are our little plans deranged, and our best-concerted schemes frustrated, through the weakness of our minds, which are liable to much ignorance, forgetfulness, and inattention! But the divine wisdom must be unlimited, which from age to age without the intermission of a moment sustains and governs all creatures and all worlds, which ordains and regulates every event, however seemingly fortuitous, and in places the most distant from each other, in subservience to his own everlasting plans and purposes.

This is OMNISCIENCE: nothing is hidden from it; not even the vainest wanderings of imagination, or the first risings of desire in the heart.

“ O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me : it is high, I cannot attain unto it*.” “ He revealeth the deep and secret things : he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him †.” “ Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight : but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him, with whom we have to do ‡.”

This perfect intelligence of the Deity implies PRESCIENCE, or a certain and infallible knowledge of all events, to us future and contingent. The succession of time can make no difference with him, whose counsels are immutable and eternal. His view, which is intuitive, reaches from everlasting to everlasting. For the whole of his own plan in the administration of universal government must always have been in the contemplation of his mind ; and nothing can possibly occur contrary to his perception, which might make it necessary for him to change his measures and designs. Such is the deduction of reason, as well as the voice of revelation. The Lord claims it as his high prerogative, to foretel distinctly and minutely the various events of the most remote periods of time, and describes it as

* Psal. cxxxix. 1, 2, 6. † Dan. ii. 22. ‡ Heb. iv. 13.

the exclusive and discriminating attribute of Deity: "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure *."

3. The wisdom and knowledge of God are gloriously displayed in Redemption. The whole plan is such as He himself rejoices in on this very account, that it proves and magnifies these perfections of his nature; and in this view the most exalted of created intelligences contemplate it with unceasing admiration. Thus it is declared that Christ is "the wisdom of God," as well as "the power of God †;" and that in Him, "according to the riches of his grace he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence ‡:" "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers might be known by the Church THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD §."

When we consider the difficulties, which obstructed the exercise of mercy towards fallen man, and his return to God, how many various cases were to be provided for, how much was

* Isa. xlv. 9, 10. † 1 Cor. i. 24. ‡ Eph. i. 8.

§ Eph. iii. 10.

to be done to vindicate the government of Jehovah, and give to all his attributes their full energy and display, to render it possible and honourable for Him to receive rebels to his favour, and to bestow upon them every spiritual blessing requisite to their recovery and their final salvation ; it must be allowed, that no finite intellect could contrive the needful expedient, or bring it into effect. Or if we survey the wondrous plan, which it has pleased the Almighty to form and to accomplish, we must confess it to be such, as could never have entered into the thoughts of any created being, and such as will for ever furnish the highest orders of rational creatures with matter for devout speculation and rapturous admiration. The study of it will open continually fresh wonders to our view, and raise increasing astonishment and delight. Such a suitableness, such an excellency, such a fulness and comprehension will appear, that we must acknowledge our God and Saviour has done “above all that we could ask or think.” The methods of his grace, even from what we can discover, are wisely adapted to display his own character, and glorify his various and seemingly opposite perfections, at the same time that the sinner is humbled, reduced to obedience, comforted, and saved. The scheme is indeed mysterious and incomprehensible : it involves, as we might expect, considerations too big for the grasp of our minds. But

this very circumstance proves that it is no human invention : and enough is understood to excite our warmest gratitude and highest admiration. On this subject more than any other, every devout inquirer will be disposed to join the Apostle's exclamation, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God !"

4. The same divine attributes appear in the various dispensations and conduct of his grace towards all his redeemed people. Manifold and mysterious are the operations of his Spirit. He is not accountable to us for the different methods, by which he may deal with different persons ; and there is a secret in the mode of his agency, which we pretend not to unfold. He "divideth to every man severally as he will *." But how astonishing is that comprehension of mind, which, while it views every case, can instantly apply the proper influence to the heart, and adapt it without a possibility of mistake or failure to every circumstance and disposition ! He knows how to recover the sinner, who has wandered the farthest, or fallen the lowest. By his infallible counsel he can guide his people through the most intricate paths, conduct them in the midst of enemies, rescue them from all dangers, and comfort them in all their troubles. This requires an extent of capacity and an intuition, to which no bounds can be affixed. They are conscious of

* 1 Cor. xii. 11.

their own ignorance and folly, but they are encouraged to rely on his unerring wisdom. “He will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, he will lead them in paths that they have not known * :” but he will enable them upon a serious review to say, “He hath done all things well.”

We should remark especially, in confirmation of this point, that he renders their heaviest distresses and severest temptations conducive to their greatest good and the very means of their salvation. He permits their enemies to shew their malignity in resisting his gracious purposes : but he laugheth these enemies to scorn, and poureth contempt on their boasted wisdom, by confounding their most sagacious and crafty devices, and even making them subservient to his own designs and the advancement of his glory. Surely his understanding is infinite.

The subject should excite our most devout affections. Let us stand in awe, contemplate, and adore ; let us love and praise “the only wise God our Saviour † !” But our conceptions as well as our expressions are faint. “Now we see through a glass darkly :” but much of the obscurity will soon be removed ; we shall see “face to face :” “now we know in part, but then shall we know, even as also we are known ‡ .” O what

* Isa. xlii. 16. † Jude 25. ‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

discoveries of the wisdom and knowledge of God will be made to our enraptured minds, when he will condescend to lay before us the whole of his plan and the reasons of his conduct; and what loud acclamations of wonder, gratitude, and joy, will be heard from every tongue!

To Him therefore we may be encouraged to commit all our concerns, and rest with perfect acquiescence in his disposal. In all our perplexities it may afford us strong consolation, to know that we have such a Counsellor, who not only possesseth, but “giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding*.” It ought to repress our murmurings, and inspire us with thankfulness and confidence, to be assured that all events, even the most afflictive dispensations, form a part of a wise plan, which will infallibly issue in the glory of God and the supreme felicity of them that love him.

Let the pride of mortals be abased, by the consideration of divine omniscience. “Vain man would be wise†;” and presumptuously sets himself up to scrutinize, to censure, or direct the conduct of Jehovah. The book of inspiration is arraigned at the bar of human reason, which dares to cavil with and correct the schemes and decisions of unerring wisdom. The administration of universal government is with great

* Prov. ii. 6.

† Job xi. 12.

arrogance investigated by our confused and very contracted understandings, and the measures of Providence are rashly condemned. This is preposterous indeed. "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it *."

How great must be the folly of sinners in resisting or neglecting the allwise and allseeing God! If your plans are opposite to his, they cannot possibly succeed, but must terminate in your own confusion. You disregard his notice, or say, "The Lord shall not see †;" but his eye continually views the secrets of your hearts, and he will expose to just contempt your vain and iniquitous designs, though now artfully concealed. By no ingenious contrivances can you elude his observation or his justice. May this consideration alarm your fears, and lead you to repentance, that "the Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished ‡!"

* Job xl. 2. † Psal. xciv. 7. ‡ 2 Pet. ii. 9.

ESSAY V.

ON THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

Love to God is not excited merely by his power and wisdom, but by his goodness. This attribute He claims, and it appears in the whole of his character and conduct, as our Creator,—Preserver,—and Redeemer.

THE attributes we have already contemplated, if considered separately and by themselves, would not exhibit the supreme Being in an amiable light. POWER and WISDOM, if unaccompanied with GOODNESS, would render him an object of terror, not of love. Could we suppose for a moment that a malignant spirit possessed these attributes, his wisdom would be no other than a mischievous craft, and his power would be exercised in violence and oppression; they would not therefore claim our adoration or encourage our hope; they would rather excite our abhorrence and alarm our fears. But when it appears, that our God is good, continually influenced by a disposition to communicate happiness, and that his omnipotence and omniscience are directed

by the most perfect benevolence, we may and we should regard him with the strongest affection and confidence.

This consideration of his desire and propensity to diffuse comfort and felicity necessarily enters into our ideas of God ; we cannot separate it from them. The very name we affix to the supreme Being, GOD, is allowed to be derived from, and to mean the same as GOOD : and his common title among the antient heathens was, THE GREATEST AND THE BEST. The more we contemplate his character, as made known to us by his works and dispensations, as well as by the testimonies of the inspired writers, the more we shall be convinced that He possesses and exercises this attribute in an unbounded degree, to the entire exclusion of every unkind and malignant affection. May the subject produce its proper influence upon our hearts ; so shall we be filled with admiration and love of his excellency, and exclaim with the prophet, “ How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty * ! ”

When Moses prayed, “ I beseech thee, shew me thy glory ; ” Jehovah replied, “ I will make all my goodness pass before thee † ; ” as if he accounted this attribute most glorious to himself : and thus he proclaimed his own name, “ The

* Zech. ix. 17. † Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19.

Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness*.” This description is confirmed throughout all the Scriptures. “The Lord is good: He is good, and doeth good: He is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. The earth is full of his goodness. He is the God of peace, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort. The goodness of God endureth continually†.”

But the matter rests not on mere assertions, though deserving of the most implicit belief; the proofs of it are daily before our eyes, and come home to the feelings of every breast. Here, as before, we contemplate the Lord God Almighty,

1. As our Creator. When we consider him as possessed in himself of all perfection and felicity, independent of all creatures, from everlasting as well as to everlasting, we might ask, What motive could ever induce the divine mind to call forth any worlds into existence, but simple and unmixed goodness, a desire to make known his glory and communicate from his own fulness for the benefit and happiness of other beings? Doubtless, this disposition in the Deity is evinced in other systems throughout the ex-

* Exod. xxxiv. 6. † Psal. c. 5. cxlx. 68. cxlv. 9. xxxiii. 5. Rom. xv. 33. 2 Cor. i. 3. Psal. lii. 1.

tended universe, no less than in our own. Here it is manifested in every part of our globe ; as in the formation of all the amazing variety and incalculable number of animals, each of which has its particular enjoyment suited to its nature and purpose, so in the formation of man in a more abundant measure. This is the honoured inhabitant, for whom the earth as a magnificent palace is furnished, and every thing in it contrived with an especial regard to his gratification and comfort. He is endued with faculties and senses, which bespeak not only the power and wisdom, but the kindness, of their great Author. Each of these is so constituted as to contribute not more to his safety than to his delight, and to shew that he was originally intended both in his body and mind for the participation of a high degree of happiness. What a rich profusion of objects is scattered around us, calculated to afford us pleasure, and so constantly offered to our notice, as to be a perpetual call upon us for the most devout adoration of the bountiful Giver of all good, and for every possible return of gratitude to Him ! We are so framed that in consulting our health and preservation, we most effectually promote our own enjoyment ; and there are no natural pleasures hurtful to us, which are taken in the manner and within the limits God hath prescribed. It might have been ordered otherwise. Our necessary food

might have been offensive, and every sense a source of pain and terror. But now we may “eat and praise the Lord *;” for “every creature of God is good, and to be received with thanksgiving †.”

2. As our Preserver. He supports the world which he has made, and continues in existence the various kinds and orders of his creatures, not only by the energy of his power, but by the rich communications of his bounty. He so upholds and governs all things, as every where and every moment to display his beneficence. He appoints the regular succession of the seasons, and by the kindly influences of the sun and the rain he produces the fruits of the earth not in scanty measure, but with a liberal abundance. Like a tender parent, He watches over each part of his immense family, and provides for every individual want. Thus “He has not left himself without witness,” in any age or nation, “in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness ‡.” “He crowneth the year with his goodness, and his paths drop fatness §.”

Let every reader review his own history, and acknowledge therein the daily and innumerable proofs of the gracious providence of his God. Let

* Isa. lxii. 9.

† 1 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

‡ Acts xiv. 17.

§ Psal. lxy. 12.

us try to enumerate his favours, though all calculation must fail: for where shall we begin or where end the account? In helpless infancy, as well as in all the various stages through which we have passed, He has been our support. We are indebted to his care for the measure of health, and every comfort in life, which we enjoy, for the kind friends so marvellously raised up and continued to us, and for the many deliverances from dangers and distresses, wrought for us in such a way as we could not contrive or conceive. “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits*.” “Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men†!”

It is alleged as an objection, that there is much misery in the world. This is allowed; and the fact, which puzzled the ancient Philosophers, and led them to strange conclusions, (as if the world was governed by two contrary principles,) is satisfactorily accounted for in the holy scriptures. They alone explain the introduction of evil and all its consequences, and clearly shew that the natural tendency of that system of things, which God hath established, is to promote universal happiness, if there were no per-

* Psal. ciii. 1, 2.

† Psal. cvii. 8.

version or abuse of his goodness. They teach us also, that, though in the common course of his providence "he is loving unto every man," there are other attributes which in his administration must have their exercise. He is compassionate, and delighteth not in the sufferings of his creatures; but He is not moved by such weak pity, as men are frequently impeded by in the discharge of their public duties. We blame not the firm and upright magistrate and parent who by the infliction of punishment give pain to those whom they love; and shall we petulantly censure the Judge of all the earth, because He hath manifested his righteous displeasure against sin?

We should be aware, that we are very incompetent to decide upon the measures of his government, that he may be actuated by various reasons which for the present are concealed from us, and that we see but a very small part of his plan. We should therefore patiently wait for that full discovery and vindication of his character and conduct which the last day will exhibit, and then all our little difficulties will be removed. It will then appear that the very evil we now deplore and cavil at hath afforded an occasion for such an exercise of his goodness, as otherwise we could not have conceived; and therefore He will be glorified in the final issue. We now believe, because we are assured by the

infallible records, that the severest afflictions proceed not from malevolence to the sufferers, that to many they prove the richest blessings, they lead the apostate sinner to seek reconciliation with his God, they preserve the believer in an humble, spiritual, devout frame of mind, draw forth and increase his various graces, and prepare him for a larger share of the felicities of heaven*. This observation properly belongs to the next division, in which we consider Jehovah

3. As our Redeemer. In this character especially He hath gloriously evinced the perfection of his goodness : goodness, beyond all calculation, immense, and infinite ! It is on this subject more than any other we shall be constrained to cry out in profound admiration, GOD IS LOVE †. The whole scheme originated from this source, and every part “ shews the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus ‡.” We may estimate his goodness from the gift he hath bestowed ; but its value and excellency cannot be known. “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life §.” What condescension and compassion are manifested to the

* 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

† 1 John iv. 16.

‡ Eph. ii. 7.

§ John iii. 16.

miserable and the lost! "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*." He proposes the blessing to the most guilty; He invites, solicits, and importunes the most careless and obdurate to accept it, that is, to be saved and to be happy for ever.

Whether we consider the method by which this salvation is effected, the incarnation, obedience, and sacrifice of the high and glorious Personage who undertook it, (for "God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all †,") or the depth of misery from which sinners are rescued, and the height of bliss to which they are raised, the variety of blessings, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, secured to them, or the means which the Almighty is pleased to employ to bring them to the enjoyment of so much felicity; all other instances of the divine goodness will appear comparatively trifling, and this will be confessed to be most stupendous; "Love which passeth knowledge ‡." "O Lord, how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men §!" Assist and enlarge our conceptions by further discoveries of thy grace in Christ Jesus, and bring us to the possession of thy glo-

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

† Rom. viii. 32.

‡ Eph. iii. 19.

§ Psal. xxxi. 19.

rious kingdom, where we shall have an unclouded view and full fruition of thy goodness, and where we shall admire, and love, and praise thee for evermore !

Various are the inferences to be drawn, and the practical improvements to be made of this subject.

1. Let us consider our obligations to Him, who hath so loved us and poured such benefits upon us, that we may cherish a thankful spirit. This disposition He claims from us, and whilst it is most pleasing to him, it will be a source of holy delight to ourselves. “ Praise ye the Lord : for it is good to sing praises unto our God ; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely *.” The contrary temper, a contemptuous neglect or forgetfulness of our chief or rather our only Benefactor, must be most offensive to Him, and infallibly produce unhappiness in the soul. Yet this is an instance of guilt, with which all are chargeable. We have not been mindful of Him, “ in whom we live, and move, and have our being † :” we have “ not rendered again according to the benefits done unto us ‡.” Ah ! what a grievous stupidity, what a base depravity of mind does this betray !

2. While we admire, let us endeavour to imi-

* Psal. cxlvii. 1. † Acts xvii. 28.

‡ 2 Chron. xxxii. 25.

tate the divine goodness. This indeed we cannot presume to do in the full extent ; our powers and faculties are so limited. But if we are “ partakers of the divine nature *,” it should appear by a conformity of disposition. “ Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful †.” “ Be ye followers of God, as dear children : and walk in love ‡.” “ Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering §.” In this view how excellent and dignified will be the character of the true Christian, who, “ beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, is changed into the same image || !” But how little of this resemblance is to be found ! What a reluctance to communicate for the relief and comfort of others ! What selfishness and oppression ! What impatience under trifling insults ! Yea, what bitterness of resentment !

3. Let us not presume upon, or abuse, this goodness. It should impress our minds with a reverential awe of His character, and a desire to please Him, whose kindness towards us has been so great and constant. Such will be the conclusions of men of real piety : “ They shall fear the Lord and his goodness ¶.” Yet how many take encouragement from this attribute to de-

* 2 Pet. i. 4. † Luke vi. 36. ‡ Eph. v. 1, 2.

§ Col. iii. 12. || 2 Cor. iii. 18. ¶ Hos. iii. v.

spise him, and harden themselves in transgression ; as if nothing were to be dreaded from a God so gracious. This very circumstance, however, that their sins are committed against so much goodness and love, as it aggravates their guilt, will render their condemnation far more tremendous. “ Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering ; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance ? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God *.”

4. Let us study to obtain a spiritual knowledge and experience of this goodness. It is not a subject for dry speculation, but rather for devout and rapturous meditation. Those, who best understand it, invite our attention to it, not only as a matter of duty, but as the means of happiness. “ O taste, and see, that the Lord is good : blessed is the man that trusteth in him †.” We shall study the subject with greatest advantage upon mount Calvary ; for there we behold the most stupendous display of the loving-kindness of our God : And with the cross of Christ in our view we shall be constrained to devote ourselves and our all to Him,

* Rom. ii. 4; 5.

† Psal. xxxiv. 8.

“ who hath dealt so bountifully with us,” and persevere with vigour and delight in his service, “ proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God *.”

* Rom. xii. 2.

ESSAY VI.

ON THE PATIENCE OF GOD.

The patience of God is displayed upon the earth, and its greatness appears, I. from what we are, as committing sins,—in various instances,—frequently repeating them,—with many aggravations,—especially backsliding,—possessing a degenerate nature,—and the whole human race being in the same apostate state. II. from God's other attributes, his sovereign majesty,—power,—holiness,—justice—and goodness.

THE goodness of God, or his disposition to communicate happiness to his creatures, has been evinced by various considerations ; and its exertions for the benefit of each individual are proved to be so numerous as to demand the admiration of every devout mind. That it should appear in its full glory in heaven towards pure and holy beings, who have never offended him, is nothing marvellous ; but it is truly so in all its operations upon earth, where he is continually despised and provoked. Goodness, when a sinner is its object, is PATIENCE, and when continued against repeated insults, it is LONG-

SUFFERING. Such is the administration of God's government over the fallen race of Adam: He withholds or delays the punishment due to the guilty, and still bestows his favours upon them. Thus we are taught to adore him, "Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious; long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth*."

The whole course of his providence demonstrates the truth of this description. The continuance of the world, the regular succession of day and night, of summer and winter, the fertility of the earth, the order and peace of society, and our own preservation in life, health, and comfort, prove incontestably, that "the Lord is slow to anger†." Let us consider this forbearance towards each individual, and in that view trace the various circumstances of our own history from earliest days. May the subject excite in us those tempers and principles which it justly calls for, shame, remorse, and penitence, gratitude, love, and zeal!

The patience of God will be best understood, and appear most worthy of our admiration, by taking into the account

I. What we are. A serious attention to our own case will induce us to acknowledge, we have committed sin; we have violated the righteous

* Psalm lxxxvi. 15.

† Psalm ciii. 8.

laws of heaven, and in consequence have forfeited every favour, and merited condemnation. We have transgressed in various ways the holy commandments delivered unto us, by wrong principles and affections, if not in open conduct ; nor have we strictly fulfilled the duties of any one relation, wherein we stand, to God or our fellow-creatures.

Our various offences, likewise, have probably been often repeated. Not one or two occasions merely, but innumerable instances of our perverseness and sad deviations have occurred. Every day in every year we have failed to improve our talents, or rather we have shamefully perverted them ; and for how long a period have we been abusing the divine goodness !

Many peculiar circumstances may have aggravated our guilt : for have we not sinned against clear instructions and strong admonitions ? If we were early taught what we ought to do, if parents, friends, and ministers, warned us of our danger, and yet we madly rushed into it with our eyes open, and in contempt of the loud remonstrances of conscience, it is the more astonishing that we should still be spared, preserved, and favoured.

Many have to deplore their declensions from the way of righteousness, which exhibit the forbearance of God in a more striking light. Have we returned to our foolish and crooked ways after solemnly renouncing them, and after expe-

riencing a lively hope of forgiveness? Have we bound ourselves by the most sacred promises and vows to serve the Lord alone, and made a public profession of his truth; and yet, after long proof of his love, and the excellence of his service, have we basely departed from him, exposing his name to the contempt and insults of his enemies? Have we done this in opposition to the convictions and gracious influences of his Spirit? We may justly wonder the more, that he has not cut us down, and especially that he still strives with us, and says, “Return unto me, and I will return unto you *.”

But though we have “escaped the corruption that is in the world,” and are not chargeable with any atrocious guilt, we have innumerable secret sins to lament; we carry about with us a continual propensity to evil, which must render us offensive to a God of infinite purity. Our depraved nature constitutes us “children of wrath †;” and that such creatures, who are alienated from him, and whose “mind is enmity against him ‡,” should not be marked by his vengeance, but daily subsist upon his bounty, is a striking proof of his forbearance. “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not §.”

* Mal. iii. 7.

† Eph. ii. 3.

‡ Col. i. 21. Rom. viii. 7.

§ Lam. iii. 22.

So far our consideration of the subject has been confined : let us now extend our views. Had there been only one such instance of the divine patience in all the human race, it might justly be deemed wonderful. But we can refer to thousands, to countless numbers. Will not every reader allow, that his own case is of this sort ? And if we go from house to house, and from town to town throughout the kingdom,—if we visit all the nations of the earth, and trace the history of man through all ages of time from the beginning,—our conclusion must be the same. How amazing is that patience, which can bear with such numerous provocations, so frequently repeated, so highly aggravated, so long persisted in, and accompanied with such a radical enmity ! what is more, a patience which even continues to render good will for hatred ! Angels must look with wonder on such a world as this, through all successive generations not only spared, but exhibiting, in every part, the most liberal provision for the comfort of its rebellious inhabitants : especially since the devils, who were originally a higher order of creatures, are consigned to hopeless and “ everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.” And shall we ourselves be unaffected with the thought ?

The subject will appear the more interesting, and the divine patience the more astonishing, if, in connexion with human perverseness, we consider

II. Some other parts of the character of the Lord God Almighty.

If we advert to his great and glorious majesty, we ask, Against whom do we exalt ourselves? And what are we, that He should forbear to execute deserved vengeance upon us? Had he destroyed us for ever, as he did the fallen angels, he would have suffered no diminution of his own glory or happiness; or if more creatures had been wanting, he could instantly have supplied the vacancy, and called millions of new worlds into immediate existence.

If we look to his power, we wonder that He, who is so strong, should yet be so patient under provocation*. He has at all times in his own hands the means of executing vengeance. He can destroy, He can crush us in a moment. He could instantly consign us to eternal misery: yet he forbears! Are we not afraid to stir up his anger? The threats and fury of a weak impotent man may be disregarded; for how little is in his power! But Jehovah can afflict in a thousand ways: he can kill, and torment both body and soul. And notwithstanding this, that he should be slow to execute judgment, gives us an exalted idea of this part of his character.

If we contemplate his holiness, it will appear that he must hate all the workers of iniquity.

* Psalm vii. 12. Old Translation.

This is not sufficiently considered : but the consideration would strengthen and illustrate our remarks upon the subject before us. We fallen creatures may look upon transgressors with a listless indifference : but not so Jehovah. He cannot but behold evil with abhorrence. It is so offensive to his nature, that in the antediluvian world, “ when he saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, it repented him that he had made man, and it grieved him at his heart *.” Sin cannot be less displeasing to him in the present day : but in his continued care and kindness to us, we receive multiplied proofs of his amazing forbearance.

Add to this the consideration of his justice. As the righteous Governor of the world, he has enacted a law, to which he requires our perpetual and unreserved obedience, under the tremendous penalty of everlasting misery : “ The wages of sin is death †.” To this sentence every offender is liable, and the honour of the law, and the character of the Sovereign, seem to demand immediate execution. Justice calls for vengeance on his rebellious subjects, “ Cut them down ;” but Patience solicits a respite, and cries, “ Spare them yet a little longer.” No blame could attach to him, if destruction should instantly seize upon transgressors : but the continuance of their for-

* Gen. vi. 5, 6.

† Rom. vi. 23.

feited lives demonstrates that he is “slow to anger;” and they should adore the greatness of the grace.

We must not omit to mention, in connexion with this subject, the extent of his goodness, as represented in the preceding Essay. His providence, we have seen, sustains, protects, and comforts those, who contemptuously resist his authority. Before judgment is executed, he warns of the approaching stroke ! he calls to submission ; he proposes, and invites to, a reconciliation. He has devised a wondrous scheme of mercy ; he has provided and revealed salvation ; he offers it freely to every penitent offender ; he urges the acceptance of it upon all ; and, after repeated refusals, he still waits to be gracious. At last, upon many atrocious, aged, and obstinate sinners, he displays his sovereign mercy, by subduing their stubborn wills, pardoning their aggravated wickedness, renewing them unto holiness, and preserving them to his heavenly kingdom. “ O the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering * ! ”

Persons of every description are interested in this subject, and should make the application to themselves.

1. Christians, you best understand it, and feel a deep impression of it in your hearts. The review of your lives fills you with shame ; but it

* Rom. ii. 4.

should also excite the loudest thanksgivings. Your perverseness has given occasion for the display of the most amazing patience in the God of your salvation ; and you are still indebted to its continued exercise. May this conviction attach your hearts more closely to him, and produce the most active exertions in his service ! Go forth, under the influence of gratitude and love, and shew that you have studied the divine character to good effect, by imitating the example which it holds out to you. “ Be ye followers of God, as dear children.”— “ Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering ; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any : even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye *.”

2. Penitents, who are deeply sensible of your guilt, and who tremble under the dread of God’s displeasure, so justly merited ; you can scarcely credit the declarations of his continued patience. You fear that it can no longer be exercised in favour of those, whose disobedience has been so highly aggravated, and so pertinaciously persisted in. But you dishonour him by your suspicions. Believe his word, depend upon his promise. He that has spared you hitherto, will not be extreme to mark your iniquities. He still favours you

* Eph. v. 1. Col. iii. 12, 13.

with the means of grace, and he is not only calling you by the gospel, but the remorse you feel, your fears of his wrath, your desire of reconciliation, may justly encourage the hope that he is even now working with you by his Spirit, and will not leave you to perish. Seize the opportunity, which he yet allows you, “of taking hold of his strength, that you may make peace with him *.” “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts †;” submit to his terms, accept the offered Saviour, and you, who are now the monuments of his patience, shall be witnesses for the comfort of others, that “he forgiveth iniquity, and transgression, and sin ‡.”

3. Sinners, who suppose that you may without danger persist in your contemptuous disobedience to God, you shamefully abuse the subject, and we fear you will do it to your destruction. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil §.” You presume that he will not punish, and thus you despise and pervert that goodness, which should have led you to repentance ||. But patience, though long exercised, has an appointed limit. The time of justice is approaching, and the impenitent shall not escape. “Their judgment now

* Isa. xxvii. 5. † Heb. iii. 7, 8. ‡ Exod. xxxiv. 7.

§ Eccles. viii. 11. || Rom. ii. 4.

of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not *.” Their misery also will be increased, as their guilt is aggravated, by the patience of God which they have abused. Yes, the long-suffering, which only encouraged them to sin the more, will be the most tormenting consideration to them that perish. “We beseech you, then, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation †.”

* 2 Pet. ii. 3.

† 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2.

ESSAY VII.

ON THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

*The holiness of God justly excites admiration :
What it is : proved—from his self-existence,—
his moral government,—the testimony of our
conscience,—the declarations of scripture,—the
extent and spirituality of the law,—the system
of mercy in the gospel,—the proceedings of the
last day,—and the final separation of the
righteous and the wicked. What effect it should
produce upon us.*

THE minds of different persons may possibly be differently affected by the several parts of the character of Jehovah. Some may be most deeply impressed by the consideration of his power, and cry out, “Thou art great, and doest wondrous things;” while others again chiefly admire his goodness, and gratefully acknowledge, “The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works.” There are those also, whose devout attention is principally fixed on the attribute of HOLINESS, as the highest excellence of his nature, and exclaim with reverence and with love, “Who is like unto thee, O Lord,—glorious in holiness?”

The blessed inhabitants of heaven are represented as contemplating and praising this divine perfection with profoundest awe and supreme delight. When Isaiah was favoured with a vision of "the Lord sitting upon a throne," surrounded by his attendant seraphim, or angels of a superior rank, such was the subject of their rapturous anthems, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, is the Lord of hosts *!" St. John, caught up into paradise, relates that the very same song is there continually sung by the celestial choir †; and that the church of the redeemed, adoring the wondrous dispensations both of his providence and grace, chiefly celebrate this attribute as displayed in them, and cry, "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for THOU ONLY ART HOLY ‡!" May we possess the same reverential awe and devout regard, while we approach to contemplate "the holy Lord God Almighty!" But let the profane and careless sinners keep at a distance: or if they should dare to draw nigh with presumptuous step, the object presented to their view may overwhelm them with confusion and terror.

Holiness is the moral perfection of the divine nature. It is infinite rectitude, the love of order, the approbation of all excellence, an entire freedom from, and hatred of, all obliquity. It is

* Isa. vi. 1—3.

† Rev. iv. 8.

‡ Rev. xv. 4.

purity without any spot; it is light without any shade of darkness. "Thou, O Lord, art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*." "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all†." It is this which constitutes his chief glory, which throws a lustre over all his other attributes, and secures the right exercise of them. It is "the beauty of the Lord‡;" it is that, which, more than any other consideration, renders him infinitely amiable, which he claims as his highest praise, and which the most exalted of the intelligent creation principally admire.

1. That God is holy, we might collect from his nature, as he is a self-existent Spirit, possessed of unlimited power and understanding. He must be entirely removed from all those ignorances, infirmities, and temptations, by which we, or any of his creatures, may be deceived, allured, and overcome. By his knowledge, he must discern things exactly as they are; and in consequence of his omnipotence, being perfectly independent, he can have nothing either to hope or to fear. It follows, therefore, that "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man§."

2. An attention to the divine government, even without the light of revelation, might convince us, that this is the character of the almighty

* Hab. i. 13.

† 1 John i. 5.

‡ Psalm xc. 17.

§ James i. 13.

Sovereign. Though there be much apparent confusion in human affairs, and the common events of life baffle our calculations; though virtue be frequently depressed, and vice possess for the present many decided advantages; yet through the whole of his administration there appears a marked disapprobation of evil; for, by his manifest appointment, its tendency is always to introduce and diffuse misery, whereas virtue, as such, never renders men unhappy. This is an incontestable proof of a moral government, or of the disposition of him, who hath ordered the natural course or tendencies of things in favour of moral goodness*. In other words, it is a satisfactory indication, that the Lord our God is holy. The important truth, which is so visible around us, is likewise clearly deducible from what we feel within us.

3. The testimony of our conscience, which approves the right and condemns the wrong, declares the mind of him who formed us. Corrupted as we now are, we are yet so constituted, as, in our judgment at least, to give a preference to virtue. It requires a certain violence to be done to our nature, where our faculties are improved, or display their proper energy, to induce our consent to the commission of gross iniquity.

* See this argument stated at large, and ably supported, in Bp. Butler's Analogy, Part I. Chap. iii.

There is that within us, which loudly remonstrates against it : and from the voice of conscience the inference is easy and undeniable ; he, who created us with such a moral sense, (though we maintain that it has now lost much of its original purity and vigour,) must possess in himself, without any deviation or obstruction, this love of righteousness, this hatred of evil. Let this principle be revered, for it was intended to answer the noblest and most beneficial purposes ; and in some degree, at least, it will intimate the will, and prove the holiness of him who made us.

But we rest not on such deductions : we have clear and full information on the subject.

4. The Lord God has declared his own character. He best understands the perfections of his nature, and he requires our adoration, worship, love, and service, chiefly as he is a God of infinite purity, “without iniquity.” Let us learn from himself, what he is, and what he demands from us. “Ye shall be holy ; for I the Lord your God am holy *.” “Exalt ye the Lord our God ; and worship at his footstool ; for he is holy :”—“Holy and reverend is his name †.” “Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ‡ :” “I will make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel, and I will not let them pollute my

* Lev. xix. 2. † Psalm xcix. 5.—cxl. 9. ‡ Isa. lvii. 15.

holy name any more; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel * !” But why need we multiply passages, which occur in such abundance throughout all the scriptures, maintaining and enforcing the same important truth? Let us study with awful reverence the divine character, thus exhibited before us,—this “perfection of beauty †;” and pray, that “beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we may be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord ‡.”

5. We may collect the infinite purity of God from the extensive demands and spiritual nature of his moral law. In those precepts he has given us an express declaration of his will, a transcript of his own mind. They contain, therefore, the surest evidence of his character. And what is his language in them, but this, “Be ye holy, for I am holy §?” When he forbids and condemns all profanation of his name and day, all neglect of his worship, the pride and murmuring of the heart against him, all irreverent thoughts of his majesty, and the preference of any creature to himself;—so likewise towards our neighbours, in the prohibition of every act and design of violence, lewdness, dishonesty, and malevolence, in the command of universal love, kindness, and

* Ezek. xxxix. 7.

† Psalm l. 2.

‡ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

§ 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

forbearance, at all times, and in all the varied circumstances of life ;—what do we learn, but his supreme abhorrence of evil, and the perfect rectitude of his nature ? Thus while we study his precepts, we are presented with a bright copy of himself ; we behold, as in a mirror, the glory and excellence of our Lawgiver and our Judge.

6. The same instruction we derive from the whole system of the gospel. It is, properly speaking, a system of mercy, including all the gracious plans and operations of Jehovah for the recovery of sinners. But it is so contrived in every part as to be consistent with his holiness, nay rather, to vindicate and exhibit it. Iniquity is pardoned, transgressors are received to his friendship here, and his presence in glory ; but all this is effected in such a way as not to encourage any favourable thoughts of sin, but to evince its odiousness in his sight, and his invariable and supreme regard to truth and righteousness.

The penalty is remitted, and everlasting life procured, only by virtue of an atoning sacrifice of inestimable worth. The eternal Father entertains thoughts of peace towards his rebellious subjects upon earth ; but to prove that their apostasy is most offensive to him, his own Son must be degraded to their nature, to bleed and die in their stead, before he will be propitiated. Every believer in Jesus is justified from all things ; but while he stretches out his hand to receive a par-

don, he is made to know and feel the evil of transgression ; for he must confess the baseness of his conduct, and his liableness to punishment ; he views with horror the nature and consequences of sin in the agonies of his Saviour, and acknowledges that he owes to the blood of the Lamb the very life of his soul. Thus the cross of Christ is a striking exhibition to the world, to angels, and to men, that the salvation of the gospel proceeds from a God of holiness.

We learn the same truth from the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, which are necessary to form the Christian character. Though those, who deserve to perish, are admitted into heaven, they are "afore prepared unto glory*." The renovating change, which they must all experience, constitutes an essential part of their salvation. By divine grace they are convinced of sin, and humbled for it ; they "abhor themselves, and repent in dust and ashes:" they are delivered from the love and dominion of all iniquity ; "created in righteousness and true holiness," "conformed to the image of Christ," and "purified unto himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works." But why is all this needful, except on the supposition that the Lord, who is jealous of his honour, will maintain a regard to his holiness,

* Rom. ix. 23.

even in the exercise of mercy, and that he can have no fellowship with unrighteousness?

7. The solemn proceedings of the last day will also prove and display to the assembled universe, that “the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and hateth all workers of iniquity*.” It should seem that it is one great design of the general judgment, to submit all his dispensations to the view of the whole intelligent creation, and draw forth the confession from every tongue, “The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works †.” The trial will be instituted, in which we must give account of the things done in the body; the very secrets of the heart, the thoughts, tempers, principles and desires, will be investigated and laid open; the exact line of discrimination will be drawn “between him that served God, and him that served him not ‡;” the irreversible sentence will be pronounced, both on them that are saved, and on them that perish; and the holy character of the Judge will be evinced and acknowledged, as well in receiving the former to “the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world,” as in dooming the latter “to everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels §.”

8. We adore him, therefore, as manifesting the

* Psalm xi. 7.—v. 5.

† Psalm cxlv. 17.

‡ Mal. iii. 18.

§ Matt. xxv. 34, 41.

same perfection of his nature, in the eternal separation of the righteous and the wicked. The redeemed he will finally “present to himself, a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish *.” He “hath made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance †.” And because it were inconsistent with his purity, and therefore morally impossible, for him to have communion with the unrenewed mind, he hath decreed, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord ‡.” The unclean must be consigned to a different society : the very sight of Jehovah would overwhelm them with terrible confusion : they must be driven from his presence, as incapable of the enjoyment of heaven, and marked by his righteous abhorrence : and they will remain for ever, as a tremendous warning to the whole creation, that “He is a God that hath no pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him §.”

If this subject produce its full influence upon us,

1. We shall confess our own impurity. The clearer conceptions we obtain of the excellence of our God, the more deeply we shall be impressed with a sense of our unlikeness to him, and the alienation of our hearts from him. Such was the

* Eph. v. 27.

† Col. i. 12.

‡ Heb. xii. 14.

§ Psalm v. 4.

effect with Job, when he said, “ I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth thee : wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*.” Such also was the effect produced upon Isaiah, when his eyes had seen the King, the Lord of hosts ; he cried out, “ Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips †.” Thus may our pride be humbled, and a conviction of our vileness make us willing to bow at the feet of the Saviour !

2. We shall seek for grace, by which we may be conformed to the divine image. Because God is holy, we must “ be born again,” and “ be renewed in the spirit of our mind ;” we must “ be holy in all manner of conversation,” and be growing in a likeness to God, being “ changed into the same image ‡.” Ah ! “ Who is sufficient for these things ?” Let us not presumptuously attempt the arduous work in our own strength. But we are encouraged to expect help from him, whose grace will be sufficient for us. Be this our prayer, then, “ O Lord, fulfil in us all the good pleasure of thy goodness, and give us finally to behold thy face in righteousness ! We shall be satisfied, when we awake, with thy likeness §.”

3. We shall ardently long for heaven, that we

* Job xlii. 5, 6.

† Isaiah vi. 5.

‡ John iii. 3. Eph. iv. 23. 1 Pet. i. 15. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

§ 2 Thess. i. 11. Psalm xvii. 15.

may no more be harassed with temptations, or defiled by the corruptions of our nature. Here our views of the divine excellence are very obscure, “we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face*.” And the immediate vision, to which we hope to be admitted, will be inconsistent with any remaining depravity. We shall be perfectly and for ever conformed to his will: “the beauty of the Lord our God will be upon us †;” “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is ‡.” The prospect should cheer our drooping hearts, and animate our feeble efforts. O the unspeakable bliss! “We are willing to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord §.” And so far shall we be from wishing him to be less holy, the unclouded view of his excellence will excite in us increasing admiration, love, and praise. “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most high ||!”

Amen.

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

† Psalm xc. 17.

‡ 1 John iii. 2.

§ 2 Cor. v. 8.

|| Communion Service.

ESSAY VIII.

ON THE JUSTICE OF GOD.

*The justice of God is deducible from his holiness; proved, from the common course of his providence,—some signal interpositions,—the nature and sanctions of the divine law,—the salvation by Jesus Christ,—and the final decision in judgment. * Objections from present unequal distributions, and from the divine benevolence, considered and answered.*

A TREMENDOUS subject now opens upon us; yet it is one of peculiar importance. It may involve many difficulties; it may give rise to some painful apprehensions; but a due consideration of it seems necessary to form just conceptions of the general dispensations of Providence, as well as of the great system of religion.

We collect the character of God from his works and from his word; and from observations already suggested it appears, that He, who made the world, presides over it as the supreme and absolute Governor, and that in his sovereign administration He exercises power, wisdom, and goodness, without limit or imperfection. We

have remarked too, that his nature is essentially holy, and that he has uniformly manifested his love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity. In other words, he is a moral Governor; he rewards and punishes his intelligent and rational creatures, with a regard to their conduct, their good or ill desert. If this be done in due proportion, and in a constant regular administration, it is strict JUSTICE. For JUSTICE in a ruler is treating others as they deserve, according to the power or authority which he possesses.

Now this attribute in the Deity may be deduced from his holiness, for it is necessarily connected with it; and the proofs of both are in a great measure the same. We have already, therefore, anticipated some considerations upon this subject in the preceding essay. The holiness of God is the rectitude of his nature, by which he is and must be led to an approbation of what is right in the conduct of his creatures, and to an abhorrence of evil. But perfect holiness in a governor, possessed of unlimited and uncontrollable dominion and might, must so direct the universal administration of affairs, as to insure an invariable regard to justice.

That God is just, is a principle generally acknowledged; and it is said to be essential to our notions of deity. We cannot, indeed, conceive of an omnipotent being, self-existent, and possessed of all possible happiness and perfection

within himself, treating any of his creatures, in the final issue of things, contrary to their moral character, that is, rendering the truly virtuous miserable, and the vicious happy. Thus Abraham argued, “ Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right *?” Thus also Elihu, “ Far be it from God, that He should do wickedness ; and from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity. For the work of a man will he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.†.” The conclusion in favour of his justice is evidently drawn from his power, wisdom, goodness, independence, and all-sufficiency ; inasmuch as he cannot lie under any temptation to act contrary to this principle.

The justice of God is generally termed distributive, as distributing rewards and punishments to his rational creatures according to their characters ; and in this view it may be either remunerative or punitive. Both will come under our consideration, but especially the latter, because we are a race of transgressors ; and it will be found, that he is not so indifferent to our conduct, as to pass over our disobedience without giving strong and tremendous proofs of his displeasure. Sinners have no ground for their pre-

* Gen. xviii. 25.

† Job xxxiv. 10—12.

sumptuous confidence, that He is too merciful to punish them eternally, or that they shall finally escape his vengeance.

“ A God all mercy is a God unjust *.”

To vindicate his righteous character, to shew that his fixed and unalterable mode of proceeding is that of a just governor, we consider

1. The common course of his providence. There is doubtless much apparent confusion, and so great an uncertainty in human affairs, that no man can calculate beforehand what shall befall him. In this sense, “ All things come alike to all : there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked †.” Yet it is obvious, that different kinds of actions have very different tendencies : virtue in various ways tends to promote comfort, vice to introduce perplexity and distress. The man of temperance, integrity, and benevolence, generally possesses the largest share of bodily health and mental tranquillity, of domestic peace, and of respect in society. Sensual and excessive indulgences, fraud, violence, and malignant affections, are the usual forerunners of infirmities and remorse, of strife and misery, of public contempt and abhorrence. It was the observation of an accurate observer of human life ; “ He becometh poor, that dealeth with a slack hand ; but the

* Dr. Young.

† Eccles. ix. 2.

hand of the diligent maketh rich *.” Society is so constituted, that to preserve its peace, its welfare, and even its existence, various transgressors must be cut off: What are all these, but so many clear intimations of the will of heaven, in favour of a virtuous conduct? It will be said, perhaps, that these events happen in the ordinary course of nature, and according to established laws: and it is the very point we maintain. For what is the course of nature, but that which the God of nature hath ordained? Or what those established laws, but the regular system by which he governs the world? That such things therefore generally take place, unless where there is some violent perversion of order, proves incontestably that they are not accidental, but occur by his appointment, and form an essential part of his righteous administration. Thus we should view his hand, and read the declarations of his mind, in the most common dispensations of his providence. Consider

2. Some signal interpositions. Besides the general afflictions of life, which are a standing testimony of his displeasure, calamities of a severer nature at times occur, which he makes use of, as we are assured, to punish a careless and disobedient world. “Fire and hail, snow and vapour, and the stormy wind, fulfil his word †.”

* Prov. x. 4.

† Psalm cxlviii. 8.

Thus saith the Lord, “When the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it. The sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, are my four sore judgments *.” Flourishing and mighty states have been afflicted, desolated, overturned, not by accident, or without design, but by his righteous appointment, who holds the reins of universal government in his hand, and who, though he be long-suffering, on some tremendous occasions “cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth †.” Thus we should interpret the revolutions and destructions of empires in profane as well as sacred history, in modern as well as ancient times; for in the Bible we are taught to do so. “Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it ‡?” In many signal instances the calamitous changes were foretold, and the causes assigned: they were the inflictions of a just ruler, maintaining the honour of his government, upon obstinate offenders.

“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and He said, I will destroy man, whom I have created §.” “Because the

* Ezek. xiv. 13, 21.

† Isaiah xxvi. 21.

‡ Amos iii. 6.

§ Gen. vi. 5—7.

sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was very grievous, and the cry of them waxed great before the face of the Lord, He rained upon them brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground *.” What does the history of Pharaoh, the tyrant of Egypt, exhibit, but a righteous God vindicating his own authority by punishments the most exemplary, and, at last, by the destruction of that obdurate sinner †? Belshazzar, the haughty monarch of Babylon, dared to defy Jehovah, and by his sudden confusion, terror, and extirpation, became a monument of his justice ‡.” The vaunting Herod, exalting himself against the Lord, was instantly smitten by an angel, who was “the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath;” and the tremendous doom was intended to teach us, that “the Lord is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another §.” Jerusalem, the holy city, has been trodden down, according to the divine threatenings, and her children have been either massacred, or dispersed throughout the earth, suffering unparalleled cruelties, becoming a by-word among the nations, and bearing evident marks of the vengeance of heaven. What shall we say, in the

* Gen. xviii. 20. xix. 13, 24, 25. † Exod. vii.—xv.

‡ Dan. v.

§ Acts xii. 23.

contemplation of these and similar changes, but
“ Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments *.”

We may resume some of the topics brought forward in the preceding essay, and consider

3. The nature and sanctions of the divine law. The Almighty Sovereign governs his rational creatures, not by a mere arbitrary sway, but by precepts the most wise and excellent, under which they were originally placed, and which he has made known to them in various ways. We take the decalogue, or, which is the same, the two great commandments delivered by our Lord, as the substance of his will respecting our conduct : and we ask, Does it not appear from this code of morality, that he demands only what is equitable, and is determined to maintain the honour of his government ? We may learn, surely, from what he requires, and from what he forbids, that he is not to be trifled with : and from the manner in which obedience is enforced, no transgressor in any one instance can presume upon impunity. Life and death are set before us, a blessing and a curse. “ This do, and thou shalt live ; but the soul that sinneth, it shall die : and whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all †.” Such is the language of him, who ruleth heaven and earth ;—such is the

* Rev. xvi. 7. † Luke x. 28. Ezek. xviii. 20. James ii. 10.

strictness of his administration. He allows of no excuse for the least violation of the precept in any possible circumstance, in temper, principle, or desire, no intermission of obedience, no substitution of one duty for another. The fatal penalty is incurred for a single offence: "the wages of sin," or the just desert of any failure or deviation, "is death*:" and the sentence is explained to be "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power†." That he can also execute, as well as threaten, the fallen angels will testify; for "He spared them not, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness‡." Who can even contemplate the nature and duration of that punishment, and not acknowledge the inflexible justice of Jehovah? Shall any treat his authority with contempt, and say, "Tush, thou, God, carest not for it?" Rather, let us "tremble for fear of him, and be afraid of his judgments §!"

It is inquired, May he not, in any case, wave the demands of his justice, and remit the penalty? The gospel will instruct us, how mercy can be exercised, and yet truth and righteousness maintained. Consider then,

4. The salvation provided for sinners by Jesus Christ. It might have been thought inconsistent

* Rom. vi. 23.

† 2 Thess. i. 9.

‡ 2 Pet. ii. 4.

§ Psalm cxix. 120.

with various attributes, especially with justice, to receive again any of our apostate race to favour. Whatever our wishes might suggest, we could not propose any expedient : but we might conclude, that if mercy could be extended to us, and the threatened curse averted, it must be in such a way as to give no encouragement to despise the Lawgiver, or to imagine that he might be insulted with impunity. We could not pronounce, that a reparation of the evil was even possible, or whether any, or what satisfaction might be admitted, or would be sufficient to secure the honour of his government, and the respect due to his laws. But he has come to our relief. He has preserved his own glory in the exercise of his various attributes, and yet granted full deliverance to us. The offender is released from punishment, but sin is not passed by, as if it were not an evil of great magnitude, but it is marked by such an expression of the divine indignation, as to make all creation tremble. A ransom of immense value is provided and accepted ; a vicarious sacrifice of incalculable dignity and excellence is admitted ; and the stroke of justice falls upon him, who has evinced the reasonableness and excellence of the law by his own perfect obedience to it, and the equity of the sentence against offenders by his suffering in their stead, “ the just for the unjust.” Thus the various, and seemingly opposite, attributes of the divine nature har-

monize and are displayed, while their respective claims are adjusted, to the admiration of the celestial world. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other *."

This very appointment may be objected to as a violation of justice, that the innocent should be treated as a criminal, and the guilty escape. But it cannot be a wrong or oppressive measure, to treat even an innocent person according to his own voluntary proposal and undertaking, though this may subject him to excruciating pains, provided, in the final issue, he be rendered happy according to his true character and desert. And who shall undertake to say, that in a strictly just and righteous government the exercise of mercy is in every case impossible; or that all the ends of justice may not be answered, and a due respect for the institutions of such a government maintained, though some transgressors may be pardoned, if a public and convincing proof can at the same time be given of the odiousness and danger of disobedience?

Thus stands the case in our redemption. The Saviour complains not of his sufferings: they were such as he foresaw, such as he proposed of his own accord, and most cheerfully submitted to. "He laid down his life of himself," and for that

* Psalm lxxxv. 10.

very cause he came into the world *. Besides, in his expiatory oblation the offended Sovereign holds forth to the view of all his subjects the greatest conceivable exhibition of the evil of sin and its tremendous consequences. Shall any now presume to insult the authority of Jehovah, which is maintained and vindicated by the death and sacrifice of his own eternal Son? The Father is represented in this amazing transaction as concerned for the honour of his law and government, and of his truth and justice, while he demands reparation from him, who undertakes to mediate; nay, the Father himself inflicts the stroke upon him. “It pleased the Lord to bruise him; He hath put him to grief †.” “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the Man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts ‡.” “Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, THAT HE MIGHT BE JUST, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus §.”

We pretend not to calculate beforehand, that this was exactly such a consideration, as would satisfy all the demands of divine justice; but we believe it on the credit of him, who better understands his own system, and we wait for a fuller explanation. We now apply for mercy with

* John x. 18. xii. 27.

† Isaiah liii. 10.

‡ Zech. xiii. 7.

§ Rom. iii. 25, 26.

lively hope and confidence ; and yet we tremble at the foot of the cross, for the sad effects of our transgression. Consider again

5. The final decision in judgment, and the respective sentences of the righteous and the wicked. The Lord hath appointed a day, in which he will vindicate his own proceedings, both in his providential dispensations, and in the everlasting separation which will take place hereafter. For that purpose he will call for our examination, and demand our approbation, of his conduct. The difficulties and objections, which now arise from our ignorance, will all be removed, when he shall condescend to lay open to our view the measures of his government. It will therefore be “ the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God *.” For the present life he may permit and appoint strange inequalities, much cruelty and oppression among mankind ; but all will then be explained, corrected, and approved. “ It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you, who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven †.”

Characters will be tried, actions weighed, and the very secrets of all hearts will be made known ; and thus it will be publicly manifested, that to

* Rom. ii. 5.

† 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

each one his proper place and portion are assigned. "Behold," says he, "I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be*." The rule of equity will be impartially observed; and though no man can claim "the reward of the inheritance," but the felicities of heaven will be conferred on the redeemed as a matter of grace, yet even in their salvation, and in the degrees of their happiness, justice will be dispensed and glorified, as well as in the everlasting miseries of impenitent sinners. Then the evidence will be complete; every mouth will be stopped; "God will be justified in his sayings, and overcome when he is judged†." Thus, though for the present "Clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" for ever‡.

Yet still we hear men urging, as if they were even now competent to decide on the measures of divine administration,

1. That such is the unequal distribution of things, so contrary to men's characters and deserts, as to stagger our confidence in the justice of the supreme Ruler. This indeed has been a difficulty in every age: it has distressed the minds of weak believers, and rendered the impenitent more obdurate. That the righteous are afflicted

* Rev. xxii. 12. † Rom. iii. 4. ‡ Psalm xcvi. 2.

and the way of the wicked prospers, may be a temptation; but we may reply, that we undertake an office for which we are not qualified. We know so little of men's real principles and their secret springs of action, that we cannot with exact discrimination assign them their proper classes, or say how they should be treated. We are equally unfit to judge of the degrees of happiness or misery, which they may respectively experience: so much depends on the state of the mind, of which, in other persons, we know little or nothing. Possibly, therefore, there may not be so unequal a distribution as we may imagine.

Besides, it should be recollected that we are in the midst of a large scheme, by far too extensive for our comprehension, that we see but a few links of the immense chain, and that it were presumptuous for us to decide upon the ways of Providence, unless we understood the causes, connexions, bearings, and consequences of different events. Since also we are assured that a full explanation will be afforded us hereafter, we ought to wait in faith and patience, not unwilling to suffer, and resting in this confidence, that the Lord doeth all things well, and will finally prove that none can have any reason to complain. No sinner can claim any favour; and no impenitent person will escape the tremendous judgment of the Almighty. But it is urged

2. That such is the benevolence and mercy of

the Deity, that nothing is to be dreaded from his displeasure in another world. Now, if revelation were silent upon this subject, it is obvious that men presumptuously conclude more than they are warranted by reason: for reason should rather teach us to expect a day of final and just retribution. The divine mercy indeed is large and extensive, and may encourage hope; but we are not left to uncertain conjectures about it. We are told, that there can be no release from the hand of justice, except in one way; and that if the gracious proposal be rejected, justice will enforce its claims with unrelenting severity.

That general and indiscriminate exercise of mercy in the sovereign Ruler of the world, which sinners plead for, would be dishonourable to his character, would be a renunciation of his truth and righteousness, and introduce confusion, sin, and misery throughout his dominion. Abhorred be such an idea! “Thou thoughtest wickedly,” said God, “that I am even such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set before thee the things that thou hast done*.”

Yet, while we plead the rights of justice, we renounce every claim of human merit, and ground all our expectations of happiness on divine mercy; we approve the sentence of the law, by which we are condemned; and we are the more thankful

* Psalm l. 21. Old Translation.

for his gracious interposition, who has undertaken to answer for us, and says, “ Deliver them from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom *.” The heaviest and longest afflictions appear light and momentary, compared to what we deserve ; and we learn not only to be submissive, but to be grateful, in any situation short of eternal misery. We rejoice in him, who by his perfect righteousness “ justifies the ungodly,” and “ magnifies the law :” and we look up with admiration, love, and praise, to him, who can be “ A JUST GOD,” and yet “ A SAVIOUR †.”

* Job xxxiii. 24.

† Isaiah xlv. 21.

ESSAY IX.

ON THE MERCY OF GOD.

The mercy of God is manifested to us,—not satisfactorily by the light of nature,—but by divine Revelation in the fullest manner. It is unmerited,—distinguishing,—plenteous, and immutable,—and exercised with a regard to other perfections.

“WHERE is God my Maker*?” is a question, though generally disregarded, of unspeakable importance, and universally interesting. It is incumbent upon us to inquire into the divine character, that we may know what are our obligations, what hopes or fears we may justly entertain; but there is no subject in which diffidence and caution are more indispensably necessary. It was the request of Moses to Jehovah, “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory†!” But perhaps he asked too much: it should seem that he desired such a manifestation as the human frame is incapable of sustaining. The Lord, however, condescended to give him that discovery, which was most useful and most suited to the condition of a sinner, not overpowering him with the bright

* Job xxxv. 10.

† Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19.

radiance of his majesty or the terrors of his anger, but revealing mercy. The Lord said, "I will make all my GOODNESS pass before thee." And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin *."

Now, He surely best understands what is his own character; and here he has explicitly declared it. He has favoured us at least with such information of himself, as, though it must impress our minds with reverential awe, inspires us with hope, and emboldens us to approach him. "The Lord our God is merciful." There are other perfections of the divine nature, as we have shewn; but mercy should be with us the most beloved attribute, as it is by that alone we guilty creatures can be admitted to any intercourse with heaven. This properly follows the consideration of justice, which if viewed by itself might damp all our efforts: especially would it appal the convicted sinner, and fill his soul with horror and despondency. But mercy spares, though we deserve punishment: it is its office to do so; it is the very meaning of the term. O what gratitude, love, and praise should it excite, to be assured that it is consistent with the honour of Jehovah

* Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

to extend mercy to our fallen race ! We inquire, then, how this attribute is manifested to us.

I. The light of nature can give us no satisfactory information, no well-grounded confidence. Yet reason itself may suggest such considerations from the usual course of God's providence, as may excite hope. The calamities, which seem appointed as punishments, though deemed the natural consequences of sin, do not always follow. There is a remission, or at least a suspension, of the sentence : and this looks like mercy in the Governor. Sinners, who are as it were under the sentence of condemnation, are spared, are continued long as in a further state of probation, are sometimes reclaimed from their vicious courses, and in consequence of their reformation receive various favours ; not unfrequently through the interposition of another. Diseases, contracted by foolish and criminal indulgences, are often removed by the application of remedies which God himself in his providence has pointed out. Careless, extravagant, and dishonest persons, plunged from a situation of rank and fortune the most respectable into the deepest distresses, are sometimes extricated, without any contrivance or desert of their's, and restored to comfort. This is analogous to the spiritual recovery and forgiveness of a sinner ; and the observation might inspire us with some faint hope that our case, though bad, may not be utterly desperate, and

that possibly the divine economy may admit of some plan of mercy. Yet the mind must still be full of uncertainty, or rather be perplexed and harassed by the most painful apprehensions. For what does it avail to be restored to health, rank, and reputation for a few days or years in this world, if the full punishment of the criminal be reserved for a future state? Are we sure that nothing is to be dreaded hereafter? Death may be the tremendous crisis, when justice may assert its claims with unabating rigour, and the sinner who was reprieved for a season may perish eternally and with aggravated ruin. Thus, with all the light which nature alone can afford, the mind of one who is truly awake to his condition must be involved in gloom and terror. But

II. Divine revelation has given us a clear and striking exhibition of mercy. It declares the possibility; it shews the amazing extent of it; it opens the way in which it can be honourably exercised; and invites offenders of every description, and without exception, to partake of its benefits.

How strong are the declarations of the sacred scriptures, which are evidently calculated to encourage hope, and inspire confidence and joy! Such as we have seen was the proclamation of the name of Jehovah to Moses: and similar assurances were given throughout the old testament. "The Lord is plenteous in mercy; his

mercy is everlasting. As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him. Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?—because He delighteth in mercy*.”

But the new testament more especially displays the mercy of our God, and places in a clearer light the strong foundation on which our confidence is built. There He appears as “The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and in him “The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort;” and we are assured that there is “remission of sins through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us;—that in the ages to come he might shew THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus †.”

* Psal. lxxxvi. 15. c. 5. ciii. 11. Isa. i. 18. lv. 7.

Dan. ix. 9. Micah vii. 18.

† 2 Cor. i. 3. Luke i. 77, 78. Eph. ii. 7.

The Gospel is, throughout, a system of grace and mercy. Its grand object is to represent "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," and to encourage us through the atonement of our great High-Priest "to come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need *." The angels sing "glory to God in the highest," because there is "peace on earth, good will towards men †." Jesus Christ, who came from the bosom of his Father, thus proclaims his mercy, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ‡." The Apostles and succeeding ministers publish the same "good tidings of great joy," declaring to all people, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation §."

The subject is extensive, as including the whole plan of redemption. It must therefore be resumed, and will furnish important matter for serious consideration in many succeeding essays; for the present our attention may be confined to a few obvious remarks.

1. The mercy of God, as made known to us, is unmerited on our part. It is favour shewn to

* 2 Cor. v. 19. Heb. iv. 16. † Luke ii. 14.

‡ John iii. 16. § 2 Cor. vi. 2.

a sinner, and therefore contrary to his desert. It has its origin in the divine nature, in the very disposition of Jehovah, of whose only purpose it is that we are saved from destruction. In this he is actuated by motives entirely derived from himself. For he saith “ I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion *.” We can bring with us no meritorious qualification, no works of righteousness, as a price to purchase the favour; nor can we boast of any succeeding services, as if we had thereby made him an adequate compensation. If our own works are introduced as giving us any claim, the very term MERCY loses its appropriate meaning †, and we challenge a reward from the awful attribute of JUSTICE. It is of great moment that we form clear conceptions, and possess right dispositions upon this subject. Let us beware of the horrible presumption of those, who would prescribe to God the conditions on which alone He should be favourable to them, and vainly imagine that by their duties they render to him as good as they receive. Rather let us join the devout acknowledgment of the Apostle, “ Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us ‡.” It was his own scheme, and even unsolicited by us. The very desire for his favour,

* Rom. ix. 15. † Rom. xi. 6. ‡ Titus iii. 5.

and the prayer of the penitent for pardon, proceed from his gracious influence, and are not the original cause, but the effect of his mercy. "He is found of them who sought him not *." Hence therefore

2. It is distinguishing mercy, in its highest benefits. There is a sense in which the Lord is kind to all men without any discrimination. "The earth is full of his mercy †." He spares, protects, and feeds the most unthankful and unholy ‡: all, without exception, partake of his providential care and bounty. But when we speak of that mercy which is "unto eternal life," we must remark that though the Gospel gives a general call, and the Lord declares himself ready to receive, and bless, and save all, of every character, who turn to him in penitence and faith, yet those who so turn must acknowledge themselves indebted to him, for disposing their wills to obey the call and accept the gracious offer. They are therefore in a peculiar manner the objects of his mercy, and they feel their peculiar obligations. Then they fear, and love, and praise, and serve him, and look with admiring gratitude on the high privileges, by which his special mercy, not their merit, has distinguished them from others. These are "the vessels of mercy whom he prepares unto glory," and to his free and sovereign

* Isa. lxy. 1. † Psal. cxix. 64. ‡ Luke vi. 35.

choice they owe their hopes, their holiness, and their salvation*.

3. It is plenteous and abundant mercy. In whatever point of view it be considered, it will excite the wonder of those who seriously contemplate it. We speak now of its highest exercise in the salvation of the redeemed. Its magnitude is vast and inconceivable;—as it is extended to objects so many that no man can number them, some of whom are selected from the lowest and the vilest of mankind;—and as it bestows blessings incalculably great and various. It gives to the returning sinner, though his transgressions be marked with peculiar enormity, a full and free pardon for all his offences,—offences which have been continually repeated and persisted in even to old age; it introduces him into the friendship and family of God; it secures to him grace and peace, strength and victory; and it admits him to a kingdom of never-ending bliss and glory. In eternity we shall best understand the extent of this mercy, which “endureth for ever.” “The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him †.” The plan was formed “before the world began ‡,” and it remains immutable, unlike the uncertain compassions and short-lived favours of our fellow-creatures. It

* Rom. ix. 23. Eph. i. 3, 4. † Psal. ciii. 17.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 9.

varies not “ among the sundry and manifold changes of the world ;” it will not be finally withdrawn even for our ingratitude ; and its blessed effects will be durable as the throne of God. Such are “ the sure mercies of David :” “ in a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment ; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer *.”

4. It is exercised with a regard to other perfections. In its largest extent it does not violate, but gloriously display, the divine holiness, justice, and truth ; because we are admitted to partake of its benefits, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. When mercy was shewn to our first parents upon their fall, the promise of the Saviour was given as the sole ground of their hope ; and sacrifices were appointed to preserve in the church a constant remembrance of the way, in which alone the just and holy God can manifest his favour to us. In every subsequent revelation and promise of mercy a respect was had to the great propitiation : and though the Gospel proclaim pardon and peace in so large and free a manner, yet it is not a mere act of indemnity. What do we learn from the mediation of the Son of God, from his incarnation, obedience, agonies, and death, but the greatness of the divine mercy,

* Isa. liv. 8. lv. 3.

which is procured for us at such an amazing expense, or rather which hath itself provided such means for its honourable exercise, as prove its magnitude and value to be infinite?

Let this subject produce its proper influence upon our minds, and we shall be encouraged under the deepest consciousness of guilt and depravity to draw nigh unto God. We shall not indeed presume to come into his presence, like the Pharisee, boasting of and claiming a reward for our negative or comparative goodness. But though constrained to weep and smite upon our breasts, we shall cry with the publican, "God be merciful to me, a sinner *!" We need not doubt of acceptance, while we renounce all self-dependence, and plead in faith the Saviour's name; and having obtained mercy we ought to indulge a holy confidence and joy. It is free, it is complete; let us shew that we can rely upon it, and think ourselves secure.

But let it not be abused. We owe to God the liveliest praises and most grateful obedience; and every consideration of his mercy should excite us to renewed exertions in his service. Let none take occasion from it to harden their hearts in sin, and say there is no danger. We should rather fear the Lord for his mercy †, as the most suitable expression of our gratitude. For shall

* Luke xviii. 13. † Psal. cxxx. 4. Hos. iii. 5.

we not dread the thought of displeasing him who has been so gracious? and especially, receiving forgiveness only through the cross of Christ, shall we not derive fresh arguments from it continually to abhor and resist that which is evil?

This is indeed the time of mercy, but the time of judgment is approaching. What folly and madness is it to trifle away the precious opportunities now afforded us! Let every careless sinner be roused from his stupor, and delay no longer: for most assuredly mercy itself cannot save those who die in their sins; but rather it will call down the heavier condemnation on them, and aggravate their misery for ever.

ESSAY X.

ON THE VERACITY OF GOD.

The veracity of God follows from his other attributes.—He cannot lie; and on this ground—his declarations should be credited,—his promises claim our entire affiance,—and the execution of his threatenings should be expected.

“IT is impossible for God to lie*,” is a principle so clear, that it seems to require no proof. It is deducible, as a natural and necessary inference, from those perfections of Jehovah, which we have already considered. If he possesses in himself all power, wisdom, goodness, holiness, and justice, he must be infinitely removed from all possibility of temptation to deceit or falsehood. The want of veracity in men arises from some weakness, ignorance, expectation of advantage, or moral obliquity; none of which can have any place in him. The declarations of men may be founded in misconception, in wrong or partial views of things; or they may be made rashly,

* Heb. vi. 18.

without a foresight of consequences; or they may not be distinctly remembered; and therefore they are not always, or with full confidence, to be received and depended on. But the perfect knowledge and wisdom of God, which must be under all circumstances invariably the same, infallibly secure him from all error, precipitancy, instability, and forgetfulness. “He is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good *?” “With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning †.” Men may be unable, though eagerly desirous, to fulfil their engagements; but his omnipotence precludes every idea of difficulty, where his word is concerned. Men may be disposed to deceive one another, or violate their promises, through a certain malevolence of nature, or through some expectation of increasing their own happiness or importance. But “the holy One of Israel,” who is self-existent, and perfectly independent, cannot be liable to such temptations; “He cannot lie ‡.”

If it appear, then, that he has been pleased to address himself to us, we should receive all his declarations with the most implicit belief, entire reliance, and unreserved confidence. We owe this to him as being assured that he is faithful

* Numab. xxiii. 19.

† James i. 17.

‡ Titus i. 2.

and true. Yet, however clear and undeniable this principle be, we have need to be continually reminded of it; we so often act inconsistently with it: for, with professions of high regard, we treat the God of heaven, in various respects, as if he were a liar; at least we are calling his truth in question. But if this attribute be given up, religion is impossible. It is this, which confirms our hopes, and inspires us with a holy courage in all our approaches to him, and transactions with him. **MERCY** proposes pardon, peace, and eternal life; and **FAITHFULNESS** engages for the performance. Through the **MERCY** of God we are emboldened to ask for salvation: and through his **FAITHFULNESS** we confidently expect it. These two, therefore, are beautifully united in the believer's views: they are most frequently coupled together by the Psalmist*; and the consideration of the latter properly follows that of the former.

Instead of advancing any further proofs that the most High cannot deceive, let us inquire what influence the belief of this attribute should have upon us. He has given us a revelation of his will, as we have seen; and in those scriptures, which contain that revelation, he has spoken, and yet continues to speak to us. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts †." Then

* Psalm xxv. 10. lvii. 3. lxi. 7. lxxxvi. 15. lxxxix. 14. xciii. 3. c. 5. &c. &c. † Heb. iii. 15.

I. His declarations should be credited. It is of importance that our minds be deeply impressed with a full persuasion of the absolute certainty of all the facts and doctrines delivered to us in the Bible. Its decisions come with authority, and, whatever difficulties may attend them, they ought not to be questioned. It is an infallible guide, which engages to conduct us safely, if steadfastly adhered to, through all the mazes of error. And it is a comfortable thought, that amidst the various religious opinions, by which even the Christian world is divided, there is a standard of truth, a sure test, by which our doubts may be resolved. We may, indeed, mistake the sense; and, after the most serious investigation, we should draw our conclusions with modesty and caution. When we proceed to the study of the inspired volume, we should bring no systems with us, nor aim at the vindication of a party; and especially should we be careful to lay aside all wrong affections, which would cloud the understanding, and warp the judgment. In our examination it will be necessary for us to use great diligence, to possess unfeigned humility, and to offer up fervent prayer to God for his guidance and assistance. This being done, we need not be kept in perpetual hesitation; but what we see to be clearly and explicitly declared, we should receive without reserve, believe and act upon with firmness and vigour.

Human reason has been too much set up, as the supreme arbiter in religion ; and nothing, which it does not fully comprehend and approve, has been allowed to be worthy of any credit. Hence revelation has lost its authority, and our dependence seems to be on our own intellect, rather than on the word of God. The consequence has been fatal to the interests of religion, many of its most important principles having been denied, or explained into nothing, in accommodation to the taste of philosophers and proud disputants. It will become us to suspect our own conceits and argumentations, as there may be great plausibility in error : and we ought to be aware of the subtilty of Satan, who by his artful devices deceives and blinds the nations of the earth.

The grand expedient for the discovery of truth, amidst the multiplicity of false opinions, is to possess a teachable and devout spirit. We should not pay an unqualified deference to the best human authorities, nor presumptuously prescribe unto God what his will and plans should be : but in simplicity of heart we should endeavour to ascertain the meaning of his written word, take it as it is, without prevarication, grounding all our sentiments upon it, and resting in it with a composed and quiet mind. Our system of faith being thus formed, it will stand against the assaults and derisions of infidels : and whatever treatment it meet with in the world, we ought

not to be ashamed of it, or give it up in fear or compliment to any man. "Thus it is written," and "Thus saith the Lord," are the arguments best calculated to remove doubts and produce conviction. Study the scriptures, then, in order to be established in right principles ; for the God of truth cannot mislead you. To repel your adversary, and maintain your ground with firmness, you should be well furnished out of that invaluable armoury ; and by much practice you will know how to wield with advantage "the two-edged sword of the Spirit."

II. His promises claim our entire affiance. The Lord has spoken to us in mercy, and encouraged our return to him by the most gracious invitations, and the strongest assurances of a favourable reception. He has bound himself to us by the most inviolable obligations, by his word, his oath, his covenant. These form the sure and immovable foundation of our hope ; and depending upon them we should possess peace, and confidence, and joy. "He abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself *."

Without promises of mercy, fallen man could have no religion : he would not presume to pray, or expect forgiveness, but sink down into a sullen and inactive despair. To encourage his return, and to animate his exertions, the grand pro-

* 2 Tim. ii. 13.

mise of a Saviour was immediately delivered to him : and this promise, renewed and confirmed by various solemnities, by covenants, types, and prophecies, was the chief preservative of religion in the world, till the Redeemer himself appeared. And now, as Christianity stands upon the same basis, it is of importance to ascertain its security. " There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises *, " by which we have access to God through Christ, with humble boldness, and can cheerfully expect a gratuitous and full pardon, the graces and comforts of the Holy Spirit, a sufficient and sanctified supply of all our temporal necessities, peace and strength and perseverance in the divine life, and in the end an everlasting state of exalted felicity and glory in the kingdom of heaven.

Such are the blessings, which the most clear, explicit, and repeated promises of God, engage to bestow upon every believer : and " they are all YEA and AMEN in Jesus Christ unto the glory of God †. " He has so worded and ratified these assurances of his favour, as if on purpose to guard against the doubts and misgivings of unbelief. Let us apply, then, this plain principle, " God is faithful, " and it will give a surprising tranquillity, fortitude, and joy to our minds. Jehovah cannot violate his own engagements. He de-

* 2 Pet. i. 4.

† 2 Cor. i. 20.

clares, “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips*.” “He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations †.” A firm persuasion of his fidelity and truth will fill our mouths with arguments in prayer, and with such a plea we shall ask with importunity, and almost claim the blessings, which he has taught us to expect: “O remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope ‡!”

How many indubitable witnesses have stood forward to attest his veracity! Let us hear the decided testimony and strong appeal of Joshua, a little before his death. “Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth, and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof §.” But this experience is not peculiar to any of the ancient saints. Believers in every age have “set to their seal, that God is true ||.” “Did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded ¶?” He, therefore, who has invariably fulfilled all his engagements, may confidently be relied on. His words of grace and

* Psalm lxxxix. 34.

† cv. 8.

‡ cxix. 49.

§ Joshua xxiii. 14.

|| John iii. 33.

¶ Eccclus. ii. 10.

mercy shall have their full effect in the final salvation and everlasting glory of all his redeemed people. Yet unbelief excites a thousand apprehensions; and even “Zion says, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotton me *.” The conclusion is dishonourable to the divine character, and argues the prevalence of a base principle in ourselves, which treats the ever-blessed God as if he were false or changeable, and could go contrary to his most solemn declarations.

III. The execution of his threatenings should also be expected. He speaks in anger to those, who resist his authority, and reject his grace. The Bible abounds with the most tremendous denunciations, which threaten impenitent sinners with vengeance and destruction. Now these also proceed from the God of truth, who means what he says; and his veracity is pledged for the fulfilment of his menaces as well as of his promises. They are not the invention of priestcraft, or mere bugbears designed only to terrify weak minds, and keep the world in awe. He, the Almighty Ruler, cannot stand in need of such pitiful expedients for the support of his government; nor can he be induced to recede from his purpose of inflicting exemplary punishment, by such low motives and contracted views as may influence human politicians.

* Isaiah xlix. 14.

“ But may he not, consistently with his truth, revoke his threatenings ?” Doubtless he may delay the judgments which he has denounced ;— he may pardon offenders upon their humiliation and penitence. It might be argued, that, though a promise gives the person to whom it is made an absolute claim upon him for the performance, he may, without injury to any one, be better than his word, by not executing his menace. But it is sufficient to maintain, that in those denunciations of punishment, in which he proceeds not to the actual infliction, there is a condition expressed or implied, on which the vengeance may be withheld. Thus Nineveh was not destroyed within the forty days, to which its continuance was limited by the prophet Jonah. But the inhabitants repented ; and it was evident they understood that the threatening was not absolute and final, but that it might be averted by the very means which they adopted. The effect intended was produced, and there was no change in the mind of God, for the event was foreseen and provided for. In accommodation to human weakness and conceptions, the Lord is said to repent, when his conduct to any particular persons is different, and his dispensations seem to indicate an alteration of his purpose or disposition. But the case is, that the alteration is in them, and not in him. Thus he himself explains his conditional declarations : “ At what instant I shall

“speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it: if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them *.”

But what he has declared in an absolute manner, his truth is bound to fulfil. Who shall presume to say, that though he threaten he will not punish? Do not his former dispensations evince a regard to his word? Has he not executed those menaces, which at the time were derided or denied? The expulsion of our first parents out of paradise, and the introduction of death into the world; the desolation of the earth by the general deluge; the excision of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone; the overthrow of Pharaoh and his mighty host in the red sea; the extermination of the Canaanites; the various calamities and captivities of the Israelites; the destruction of haughty Babylon, of Tyre and Sidon, of the city and temple of Jerusalem; and the present degraded and dispersed state of the Jews;—all these are tremendous proofs of the veracity of Jehovah

* Jer. xviii. 7—10.

in his threatenings, and afford a solemn warning, that he will in a future state inflict upon sinners in full weight and measure the vengeance which he has denounced.

O, be advised to take the alarm, and flee from that wrath, which will surely come upon all “the children of disobedience *!” “Laying hold upon the hope set before you †” in the covenant of grace, you may rejoice in this attribute, as the basis of your security, and the source of all consolation. But, while you trust in the divine faithfulness, be you mindful of your own engagements. Deal not treacherously;—lie not unto God. “Join yourselves to him in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten ‡;” and live under this conviction, that the vows of the Lord are upon you.

* Eph. v. 6.

† Heb. vi. 18.

‡ Jer. l. v.

ESSAY XI.

ON THE TRINITY IN UNITY.

Caution and humility necessary in our inquiries about the mode of God's existence.—There is only one Jehovah,—but a plurality of persons is expressly revealed,—divine honours being ascribed to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. —The doctrine mysterious,—but important, and of a practical tendency.

WHILE we are investigating the various attributes of Deity, the inquiry may properly be proposed, To whom, or to how many do these attributes belong? Is there a plurality of Gods? Or are power, wisdom, goodness, holiness, and truth, without any limit or imperfection, the exclusive properties of only ONE person? The subject is most interesting, and our speculations, if conducted on right principles, will not prove idle or unprofitable. But on no point whatever are caution, diffidence, serious attention, and devout prayer, more necessary. We now seem to be approaching nearer to “the secret place of the most High,” and should remember the check which Moses received, when he turned aside to contemplate the glorious appearance of Jehovah.

Let us listen to the solemn admonition, “ Draw not nigh hither ; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground*.” We should proceed with a deep reverence and awe upon our minds, not indulging any vain curiosity, or presuming to pry into those things which are concealed from us. Rather, let us stand at a distance, in humble adoration of that glory, the full blaze of which our enfeebled eyes cannot now sustain. At present we cannot come nigh ; much remains to be removed, our ignorance, guilt, pollution, flesh and blood ; but these being taken away, “ We shall see him as he is †.”

Some little he has told us concerning himself, and it cannot be wrong to study this revelation with humility and fear : but if we enter into subtle disquisitions, or indulge any vain conceits about the MODE of his existence, we shall be baffled and confounded. When Moses inquired, what was his name, he replied only, “ I AM THAT I AM ‡.” This will not satisfy the curious speculatist, but it should check his presumption. We should learn from it at least, not only that Jehovah is self-existent, (the source of being and of all happiness, possessing every thing in and of himself,) but also that he is incomprehensible : he is, what he is ; and he refuses to answer our

* Exod. iii. 5. † 1 John iii. 2. ‡ Exod. iii. 14.

captious inquiries. We must allow him to exist in a way which we cannot comprehend, and which though our reason cannot explain or conceive, it would be impious to deny. Under the influence of this caution we proceed to the important doctrine before us, and remark,

I. There is but ONE infinite, eternal, and almighty Being, whom we call GOD. It has been supposed that this clear and simple proposition is demonstrable by reason : and doubtless reason may shew its probability, if it do not produce full conviction of its absolute certainty. It appears absurd to imagine, that there should be more than one omnipotent and independent existence; for if there were more, they might restrain and control each other: and the supposition of one God is sufficient to account for the creation and government of the universe, and for what are called the operations of nature. There is also an unity of design, which runs through the whole system of things, as far as we are acquainted with it, which seems inconsistent with the idea of a plurality of distinct and separate beings, of equal power and perfection, presiding over the world; for such might have different and contrary volitions, and pursue plans in opposition to each other. But if unassisted reason, as it is argued, were so competent to decide upon this point, and could so clearly prove the absurdity of polytheism, what cause can be assigned for the strong

propensity of men, in every age and nation of the world, to multiply their gods? We may ask, where are the boasts of reason, if we contemplate the universal prevalence of pagan idolatry, with all its egregious follies and abandoned wickedness? May we not rather conclude from fact and experience, that the light of nature, without the aid of revelation, never did effectually teach, however it may approve, the doctrine of the divine Unity?

We owe the belief of this doctrine to the explicit declarations and immediate communications of God himself. When the nations of the earth had sunk down into the grossest ignorance and superstition, universally worshipping creatures and fancies of their own, he was pleased to select one family, Abraham and his posterity, who should be the depositaries of his truth, and preserve amongst them the knowledge of the one, living, and eternal Jehovah. "Unto them it was shewed, that they might know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him:" and their attention was particularly directed to this point, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is ONE LORD*." The new testament speaks the same language, and among those who acknowledge its authority there ought to be no controversy on a question so clearly determined: "There is none

* Deut. iv. 35. vi. 4.

other god but one:—To us there is but one God *.”

It is indeed frequently supposed, that those who maintain, what is usually termed, the orthodox system of the Christian church, and worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, renounce the Unity, and are Tritheists. The objection is urged with great unfairness, as it is so contrary to their own most solemn declarations, and as they invariably assert that the doctrine of the Unity forms an essential part of their creed. They contend that all the testimonies of the sacred oracles prove only the unity of the divine essence, and do not exclude a plurality of persons from that essence. Jehovah, the object of our worship, is but ONE ; and he says, “ My glory will I not give to another †.” Yet it will appear, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by a mysterious incomprehensible union, are that one Jehovah, whom we are required to adore, in opposition to the polytheism of the heathens. We remark, therefore,

II. A plurality of persons in the Godhead is expressly revealed. The very mention of this doctrine is often treated with contempt and profane derision. It might seem from the scorn of our adversaries, that there is something in it peculiarly absurd, nonsensical, and contradictory: but on what ground will these charges be sub-

* 1 Cor. viii. 4—6.

† Isaiah xlii. 8.

stantiated? Will reason undertake to prove the impossibility of such an union? That cannot be. Reason is compelled to allow many things equally inconceivable. Or shall reason be admitted as competent to decide, in what MODE Jehovah CAN and MUST exist? This were surely beyond its province: it can advance nothing upon the subject. Our appeal lies only to the inspired writings. Let the most high God be heard concerning himself; for he can best describe the manner of his own being.

His language in various parts of the old testament is appropriate, and is to be explained with justness or consistence, only on the supposition of the doctrine before us. He speaks, not as a single agent, but in the plural, as more than one: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:" and again, "The man is become as one of us*." Thus also the plural substantive is frequently used for his name, and yet joined to a verb singular; and on the contrary, when the substantive is singular, the verb is plural. The phrases themselves are mysterious, and would form an anomaly in grammar, if not more than one person were included in the Godhead; but they are plain and natural, if there be a Trinity in Unity. It would be derogatory to the honour of the divine majesty, to interpret them as bor-

* Gen. i. 26. iii. 22.

rowed from the style of human kings, who assume a loftiness of words to add to their own importance. Jehovah can stand in no need of such pitiful expedients, and must speak according to truth.

A plurality of persons was clearly intimated to the patriarchs and prophets, to Abraham and Lot, to Moses and Joshua, Isaiah and others, by various appearances, visions, and revelations. In the solemn benediction, which the priests pronounced upon Israel, the name of Jehovah was three times repeated, and, as it should seem, with an important meaning. It is at least a suitable conclusion, that there are three distinct persons in Jehovah, who have the power of blessing*; and this we are expressly taught by the apostolical benediction. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon his throne, surrounded with heavenly spirits, chanting their hymn of praise, with a three-fold repetition, as if to three persons, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts;” and we are assured that not the Father only, but Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost also, is the very Jehovah, whom he then saw †.

These three persons are brought more distinctly to our view, as engaged with perfect harmony in the economy of man’s salvation. The

* Numbers vi. 23—27.

† Isaiah vi. 1—3. John xii. 41. Acts xxviii. 25.

Redeemer saith, “ The Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me :” the Father saith to the Son, “ My Spirit is upon thee *.” In the new testament this mystery blazes forth with peculiar glory ; and believers are continually reminded, that “ through CHRIST they have an access by one SPIRIT unto the FATHER †.” The three are real persons, because each one of himself, by his own sovereign will, contrives and executes his plans, and acts in a distinct office. Yet they are ONE ‡, “ their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal ;” because the same names and characters are ascribed to each, they all possess the same incommunicable perfections, and perform those operations which are peculiar to deity, and for which no finite power is competent. They are all styled Jehovah, the Holy One ;—they are true, eternal, and almighty ;—they know all things, and are every where present ;—they have created, and they sustain all things ;—they teach, govern, and sanctify the elect ;—and finally, they quicken and will raise the dead §. What can we conclude, but that there is a trinity of persons in the Deity ; and yet that there is a perfect union and a perfect equality among them ?

The same truth forces itself upon us with full conviction, from two particular passages of scrip-

* Isa. xlviii. 16. lix. 21. † Eph. ii. 18. ‡ John x. 30.

§ See Jones's Catholic Doctrine of a Trinity.

ture ; and their being retained in the church, as appointed forms, seems to promise a continuance to the belief of the doctrine. 1. All nations are commanded to be baptized “ in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost *.” By this solemn rite men were required to renounce their false gods, and to acknowledge the God of the Bible ; from whence the inference is unavoidable, that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are that only and true God. Besides, they were thus to dedicate themselves to him, and enter into covenant with him : and this is to be done in the same manner, and therefore in the same sense, to one as to the other of these three persons. Nothing less can be implied herein, than a profession of worshipping, believing in, and serving Father, Son, and Holy Ghost : We are devoted to this holy and undivided Trinity. 2. We are blessed in their name. By apostolical example the ministers of Christ are authorized thus to commend their churches and congregations to the same three persons : “ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all † !” This is clearly, if any thing can be, an act of adoration, by which the divinity of each is confessed. We are therefore taught to pray to the Son and the Spirit, equally with the Father, and to main-

* Matt. xxviii. 19.

† 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

tain the same dependence upon them for the peculiar grace and favour, which, in their respective offices, they bestow.

We read not of any other person claiming equal or similar regard. Three, and three only, possess the properties of divinity: these concur in the works of creation, providence, and redemption, and subsist in one essence without difference or inequality. Such is the doctrine, which has been from earliest ages professed by the catholic church; and while "we acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the divine majesty worship the Unity," we pray, that we may be kept "steadfast in this faith*." It is the support, the confidence, and joy of believers, who daily feel their need of a Redeemer and a Sanctifier, and make a particular and devout application to the three persons of the Holy Trinity in their daily exercises of prayer and praise.

"To the FATHER, therefore, let us address ourselves for pardon and admission to our heavenly inheritance; "O God, the Father of heaven, have mercy upon us miserable sinners!" But, as we have no deserts of our own, no works of righteousness, by which to claim his favour, and are entitled only through the sufferings and satisfaction of Christ, let us beseech HIM to in-

* Collect for Trinity Sunday.

tercede for us, and plead his merits with the Father; "O God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us miserable sinners!" And since the benefits of his merits are applied, and our pardon sealed, and ourselves enabled to render an acceptable service, only by the operations and assistances of the Holy Spirit, let us implore His aid also; "O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, have mercy upon us miserable sinners!" Yet remembering that how various soever the economy may be, salvation is the one sole undivided end and work of all; therefore to ALL let us address our earnest prayers and invocations, as to the great power to whom we have consecrated ourselves and services; "O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners *!"

To take a more enlarged view of the doctrine, we might consider

1. Its mysteriousness. We allow, we maintain, that it baffles all our attempts to comprehend it. But our ignorance ought not to be urged as an objection. For on the same ground we might refuse to believe the creation of the world, which also surpasses our understanding. And how few things are there, of which we have clear and distinct knowledge! The mode of our

* Bishop Horne,

own existence, the union of the soul and body, and their mutual influence on each other, the growth of the grass and corn, the amazing variety of the whole vegetable system, produced and sustained from the same particles of earth, and a thousand other matters, of which we entertain no doubt, equally transcend all our conceptions. The objection, then, if admitted, would lead to universal scepticism. But the doctrine is said to involve a contradiction, as it is impossible that three can be one, and one three. The reply is obvious : this is a perverse and false statement ; for when we assert, that the supreme Being is ONE, and yet THREE, we mean that he is so in different respects ; and on such a representation the supposed impossibility vanishes. But it is grievous to observe the profane levity, with which the subject is treated by many, and it cannot surprise us, that with their disposition they should be unbelievers.

2. Its importance and its practical tendency. Let these be maturely considered, that we may "contend earnestly for the faith." It has lately been the fashion to speak of the doctrine of the Trinity, as a matter altogether of curious speculation, perfectly unconnected with practical religion, on which, therefore, we may safely allow men to differ. When any are thus induced to view it as a point of no moment, they can have no zeal to bring it forward, or rather they will

easily give it up, in compliment to its opposers, and to secure for themselves a character for charity and candour. Abhorred be such tameness as this ! It is, as we believe, the doctrine of the Bible, and those, who worship not this God in Trinity, form a god to themselves, a creature altogether of their own imagination. Is there no presumption, is there no impiety in this ? Besides, it is a principle which does not stand alone : it is connected with every fundamental article of our faith. It is so essential a part of the Christian system, that the whole must fall with it. Take away our Redeemer and our Sanctifier, and you leave us little that is worth contending for. Thus it is generally found, that the doctrine in question is rejected by those, who have light thoughts of the evil and danger of sin, and no deep convictions of their guilt and depravity. To them, indeed, it may appear incredible, that one divine person should procure their forgiveness by the sacrifice of himself, and that the almighty influence of another should be necessary to renew them unto holiness.

But there are those, who feel the doctrine to be exactly suited to their case, the foundation of their hope, the source of their liveliest joys, and their strongest incitement to holy obedience. With them it is not a point of barren speculation : it fills them with heavenly consolation, and inspires them with gratitude, love, and zeal.

Will not this produce the happiest influence on their tempers and conduct ? It must be their desire and aim to express their obligations to the three divine persons by an entire devotedness to their service : and therefore it is the language of their lives, as well as of their lips,

“ Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end ! Amen.”

ESSAY XII.

ON THE CREATION OF MAN.

Man is God's principal workmanship upon earth; whence consider—our creation,—the original constitution of our nature, as including the divine image,—and the chief end and design of our formation.

THE Lord God, whose character and perfections we have endeavoured in some measure to investigate from the discoveries which he has made, is not to be considered absolutely in himself, so much as in relation to his creatures. He is, indeed, perfectly independent, and incapable of receiving any addition to his essential glory or happiness from any external causes. He existed the same from everlasting, but every thing besides has had a beginning, and owes its origin to him. He has communicated out of his infinite fulness to a variety of beings, and there may be many worlds, where his wisdom, power, and goodness, are displayed in different ways. MAN is his chief workmanship upon the earth; and our principal concern is to ascertain the character of man, his circumstances, talents, and obligations.

The study of the works of God is a delightful and rational employment, and will furnish us with matter for devout admiration and praise. We see, indeed, but little out of all their amazing extent ; yet that little is sufficient to give us enlarged conceptions of him, who made and sustains the whole. Let us attend to ourselves, and inquire what have we received from him, and what do we owe to him. This subject properly follows our consideration of God's attributes : for do we not stand related to him ? and are we not bound by strongest ties to render him all the services of which we are capable ? What, then, was our original formation ? In what manner, with what faculties, and for what purposes, were we made ? Such are the interesting inquiries to which we proceed. We remark

I. Our creation. Our individual existence has been of short duration ; but many generations of our species have appeared in orderly succession upon the earth. Yet, whatever may have been its continuance, the world is not eternal ; and man, like the globe he inhabits, had a beginning. Nor is this a matter of uncertain conjecture ; but clear and decisive information is given us of the time and the way in which he was first brought into being. We allow no credit to the absurd and unsupported traditions of some superstitious nations, who boast of an origin more ancient than the dates of scripture. They are evidently fabu-

lous : and the Bible is the only book which contains an authentic and consistent account of the formation of the earth and its various inhabitants. Six thousand years have not yet elapsed, since the Almighty **FIAT** called every thing here into being. That was **IN THE BEGINNING** : there was no time before it, but an immeasurable eternity ; and from thence, therefore, all our calculations must take their rise.

Vast preparations were made for man by the previous production and orderly disposal of other things. This his house was built and furnished, and the various animals, as so many attendants, were ready for his reception, before he, the great lord and master, made his appearance. The creation of our first parents, from whom the innumerable tribes of the human race were to descend, was the last and chief work of God ; and to this he proceeded with a peculiar solemnity, marking its importance : for man was intended to have dominion, as the representative, and bearing the impress, of his Maker. Jehovah said (not to any creatures, whose workmanship we cannot be ; but the three Persons in the Deity consulted together on the momentous object), “ Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”—“ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him : male and female created he them *.”

* Gen. i. 26, 27.

Such is the plain and simple account, which the inspired volume gives of the formation of our great ancestors, and of the excellency and glory which they then possessed. We need not inquire more minutely into the fact. From them we are assured the whole species has been propagated, in the way of God's original appointment. No other man existed before Adam; no other was created as he was: we have all, therefore, derived our origin from him. "God hath made of ONE BLOOD all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth *." But though his descendants are brought into the world by what is called natural generation, they are all, as much as Adam was, the work of God's hands: and it becomes us to say, with devout admiration, gratitude, and praise, "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture †." Consider further

II. The original constitution of our nature. The corporeal frame is a wonderful piece of mechanism, and carries with it such beauty, symmetry, and dignity, as are clear intimations of a divine Artist. The body of Adam, probably, at his creation, possessed a strength and energy of which we have little conception, and, as some have thought, an external radiance, which distinguished him as God's vicegerent upon the earth.

* Acts xvii. 26.

† Psalm c. 3.

His mind also was endowed with excellent faculties, with an extent of intellect, a quickness of apprehension, a clearness of discernment, a certainty and retention, far superior to the most enlarged abilities and attainments of the brightest genius among his posterity. These, however, are considerations, which do not properly belong to our plan : we propose to inquire, not so much what were man's bodily or mental powers, as what was his moral character.

Those among the heathens, who were most attentive to the state of the human soul, concluded that it must have suffered some sad lapse, and could not have come out of the hands of the Creator with those infirmities, propensities, and obliquities, which it now discovers. The fact is explicitly declared in holy writ. " God made man upright *;" and therefore his condition was that of perfect innocence, and of high moral excellence. There was no perverseness, no tendency to evil, in any part of his mind ; nothing that in the least degree deviated from the rule of rectitude. His duty, whatever it was, must have been his invariable and delightful employment. This, then, was an entire conformity to the will and character of his Maker. In other words, as expressed by the sacred historian before quoted, " God created man in his own image †."

* Eccles. vii. 29.

† Gen. i. 27.

The divine likeness, which Adam bore, may involve in it various sorts of excellence or dignity. Power and dominion seem to be implied in it : as it was intended that he should stand in the place of the Almighty Sovereign, to preside over all terrestrial animals. “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands ; thou hast put all things under his feet *.” The Lord, indeed, has no shape or external appearance, but he has given to man that sublimity of countenance, which may be called his natural image ; and accordingly this is assigned as a reason by himself, that murder shall be punished with death. For he that commits violence upon the representative, insults and attacks the divine majesty in him ; and he, who destroys the resemblance, would, if possible, destroy the great Archetype himself.

But man’s superiority over the brutes was not his chief excellence, was not the main point in which he was assimilated to the Deity. His very nature bore the stamp of God’s highest glory, which is his perfect holiness. This we collect from those passages of the new testament, in which the change produced upon believers by the Holy Spirit is called a *RENOVATION*, a restoring of that goodness and purity which have been lost by the fall. They are “new creatures,” or cre-

* Psalm viii. 6,

ated, as it were, over again, in the state of their mind :—they are “ made partakers of the divine nature,” receiving from the grace of God that new nature, by which they become, as Adam originally was, like unto him, conformable to his will and disposition *. They have “ put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge AFTER THE IMAGE of Him that created him ;” and “ which AFTER GOD is created in righteousness and true holiness †.” These descriptions are decisive, and shew clearly the primitive dignity and glory of human nature. They exhibit, at least, two features of that divine likeness, which Adam in paradise possessed, and which we recover by the grace of Christ.

1. “ Knowledge.” Such was his discernment, such the acuteness and extent of his intellect, that he understood the character and mind of God, his own relations to him, and his various duties thence resulting. The moral law, which, as to substance, must be eternally binding on all rational creatures, and under which he was originally placed, he probably knew at once in all its spiritual meaning. There could, therefore, be no darkness in his views, no error in his judgment. To this intellectual excellence the redeemed are or will be restored ; as it certainly is a part of what they have lost. The promises are,

* 2 Cor. v. 17. 2 Pet. i. 4. † Col. iii. 10. Eph. iv. 24.

“ I will put my laws into their mind,—and all shall know me,” saith the Lord *. On this ground we pray, “ that we may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding †,” and we rejoice in hope that we shall “ see God face to face, and know even as also we are known ‡.”

2. “ Holiness.” So far only we are recovered and brought back to God, as we resemble him in this respect. He is perfectly holy ; and then by his grace we bear his image, (that is, we regain our pristine dignity,) when our wills entirely acquiesce with his, when we choose with alacrity, and pursue with vigorous and lively affections, whatever he commands, and we know to be pleasing in his sight. This is the state of the renewed mind, and doubtless it was Adam’s without the least perverseness and obliquity. How glorious a creature ! While he so stood, he was indeed like his Maker, as being “ LIGHT, and in him was no darkness at all §.” The divine law, requiring the perfection of love and obedience, whether published or not in an audible manner, was written upon his heart ; for all its commands were such as he approved and delighted in. His desires, plans, principles, pursuits, and enjoyments, were all strictly and invariably regu-

* Heb. viii. 10, 11.

† Col. 1. 9.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

§ 1 John i. 5.

lated by a regard to that unerring rule of righteousness and truth.

Thus man was originally constituted; and so pure and excellent a being could not but be blessed. Happiness must be inseparably connected with holiness. Angels and glorified saints in heaven are happy, because they are entirely conformed to the mind of God, having neither hopes nor fears, nor affections of any sort, which can give them one moment's disturbance. Thus it was with Adam: not the place of his habitation, not paradise with all its fruits and beauties, but his likeness to God in the state of his soul, was to him the rich source of peace and joy.

Yet he was capable of sinning, as the dire event has proved. He possessed liberty, a liberty of choosing and of acting without restraint; and therefore he had it in his power to stand or to fall. But we presume not to ask, why such a freedom was given him, as his Creator knew would be abused to his ruin; nor do we attempt to explain, how the sad change could be effected, or how corrupt desires could find admission into a heart so pure and holy. These are points, on which it might be dangerous to speculate: we have no clear information to guide us; and we ought not to call the Almighty Sovereign to account for these or any of his dispensations.

One thing is clear; he was put upon his trial, and in the issue of that trial we were all unspeak-

ably interested. He was placed under a covenant, which has generally been called “the covenant of works,” because life and death depended upon his personal obedience. The law given to him was in the form of a covenant, containing both a promise and a threatening: and the transgression is called a violation of the covenant; “They, like men, (or like Adam,) have transgressed the covenant*.” Our great ancestor was considered and dealt with as a common head or representative of his species; for on this account chiefly the Saviour is compared to him, and is called “the last Adam,” or “second Adam,” because in the new covenant he hath treated and acted for his believing people †. Righteousness has now come by one unto justification of life, even as judgment came by the other to condemnation.

How extensive would have been the benefits of Adam's continuance in this holy state, in what way the blessings of immortal glory and felicity would have been secured to him and his posterity, whether they might have remained on this earth, or in due time have been translated to some more distinguished abode, we are not informed: and, therefore, on these and similar questions, it is better for us to be silent, than form any conjectures, which would be uncertain and fruitless, if not presumptuous. Doubtless, if the covenant

* Hos. vi. 7. † See Rom. v. 14—19. 1 Cor. xv. 45, 47.

had not been broken, death and misery would have had no place in the world. We may lament the sad failure of our first parent ; but who shall dare to say, that he himself would not have failed in the same circumstances ? Or who shall arraign the conduct of Heaven, in suspending the happiness of the millions of his species on his individual obedience ? The subject is too high for our speculations ; but let us wait, and God will vindicate his own appointment. We may, however, profitably consider

III. The chief end and design of man's formation. We may be assured that our great Creator proposed an object worthy of himself, and that his plan was, not to receive, but to communicate good. We were therefore endowed with noblest faculties, capable of contemplating, admiring, praising, and glorifying him, and these faculties ought vigorously to be exerted for these very purposes. He has a right to demand and expect from us every service we can render. We are placed under his dominion, and as his subjects we owe him reverence, fidelity, and obedience. It would be for the honour of his divine majesty, if our whole species were thus cordially and unreservedly devoted to him, invariably consulting his will, and zealously aiming at his glory : and it is every way worthy of Jehovah to intend such a manifestation of his own excellency, by producing innumerable creatures who should offer

him continual thanks, love, and adoration. "This people," said he, "have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise*."

As this is the declared end of our existence, we are required to render to the Lord our most devout and lively services. "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."—"Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye, that the Lord, he is God; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." Therefore, "bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul!"—"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created†."

It is inquired, perhaps, whether the Deity was not influenced by pure benevolence, or a desire of communicating happiness: and it is allowed, that such a disposition clearly appears in the whole plan, by the rich provision made, not for the mere sustenance, but for the comfort of his creatures. Yet, the chief felicity designed for man was of a holy and spiritual nature, springing from and consisting in a conformity to the mind

* Isaiah xliii. 21.

† Psalm xcvi. 6. c. 2, 3. ciii. 22. Rev. iv. 11.

of God, an active obedience to his will, a sense of his favour, and a state of communion with him. Other creatures upon earth have peculiar enjoyments suited to their condition, but man alone is capable of approaching to God, and maintaining an intercourse with him: and it should seem from our original constitution, that our Creator intended to make us happy, not like the lower animals by sensual gratifications, but in the knowledge, love, and service of himself.

The sad change introduced by the fall was foreseen: and the great system of redemption was contrived and determined, even “before the world began *;” so that the world itself, in some sense, must have been made in reference to it. But this, which is confessedly a high and mysterious subject, will more properly come under our consideration in some succeeding essays. For the present let us close our meditations with a short practical improvement.

Let us gratefully acknowledge our obligations to God for our creation. Whatever alteration may have taken place in our state and circumstances, his claims upon us are still the same: we owe him unremitting love and obedience. Let us ask then, Why were we sent into the world? Why assigned to such a rank in the scale of existence? Why endowed with such faculties? The answer must be, We are not to take our pastime

* 2 Tim. i. 9.

here, or trifle away the season allotted us. We are not our own ; we are the Lord's : Let us therefore glorify him in our body, and in our spirit, which are his.

If we feel a painful conviction, that we have lost our original excellence, and that "the glory is departed," let us inquire, how we may be restored. We have too many melancholy proofs, that man is turned out of paradise ; but is there not a way opened, in which that state of purity and bliss may be regained ? We thank God through Jesus Christ, that he hath provided for us a better and more certain inheritance. He says, "Behold, I make all things new *:" and those, "who are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works †," shall inherit everlasting life and glory.

Far different is the prospect of the impenitent. Let them tremble at the idea of meeting their Creator, whose bounteous gifts they are abusing, and whose gracious and holy purposes they are counteracting. He will call them to account, and "will get himself honour ‡," though it be in their final destruction. To those, who are not redeemed, creation itself will be a curse : "it had been good for them, if they had not been born §." May all be solicitous to prevent such a tremendous issue, and "flee from the wrath to come ||!"

* Rev. xxi. 5. † Eph. ii. 10. ‡ Exod. xiv. 17.

§ Matt. xxvi. 24. || Matt. iii. 7.

ESSAY XIII.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF MAN'S UNDER- STANDING.

Man's fall,—introduced by the sin of our first parents,—appears in the corruption of all his faculties,—in that of his understanding,—the extreme degeneracy of which is proved,—by the state of the Gentile world,—by that of places favoured with revelation,—by the declarations of holy scripture,—by the case of real believers,—and by the extreme stupidity of men in general, as to spiritual things, even under greatest advantages.

IN order to ascertain the nature of true religion, it is requisite that we form right conceptions of the present character and situation of man. We should know what he is, of what he is capable, and what are his necessities. We have seen, that he was originally designed for noblest purposes, and that he was a glorious creature indeed, when he first came out of the hands of his Creator. But a deplorable change has taken place: he is not now what he once was: he has fallen from his exalted rank: he has lost his chief dignity and happiness, the image and favour of his

God, and is sunk down into a state of the lowest moral degradation, of guilt and misery. Come, and let us weep over the ruins of this grand and beautiful edifice. We may trace the remains of the most exquisite workmanship ; but, alas ! the view is affecting and humiliating : at the same time we may derive from it the most salutary instruction.

How the sad change was introduced, we are informed in the holy scriptures. Through the insinuating wiles of the devil, our first parents were induced to violate that one positive command, which was given them as a test of their obedience. They sinned, and incurred the tremendous penalty. They were driven out of paradise, and exposed to the heavy displeasure of Heaven. They became corrupt in all their faculties, were involved in present misery, and every moment liable to be cut off by the sentence of death, and to be eternally separated from God. But the dire effects of transgression did not terminate with themselves : it will appear by irrefragable proofs, that these have extended to all their posterity. Such is the important subject, which now comes before us.

Adam, it should seem, acted as the head or surety, and on behalf of the whole human race : all were concerned in his observance or violation of the covenant. He has not only communicated his depravity to us, but we are accounted and

treated as guilty in him. "By him sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that (or IN WHOM) all have sinned." Even infants, who "have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," that is, who have not personally, or by any wilful act of their own, violated the divine command, are considered as involved in the original condemnation; for death, the threatened penalty, "has reigned over them." "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation: by his disobedience they were made sinners*." Such is the scriptural account of that original sin, which proved so fatal; (and any other sin of our great representative would have been equally so;) and such are the sad consequences entailed upon us.

Fact and experience will confirm the doctrine. Whatever plausible objections may be urged against the imputation of Adam's sin, who will deny that we all bear the marks of God's displeasure from our very birth, in the various miseries of life, and the infliction of death? Who will deny, that we inherit by our descent an infirm and diseased body, and a soul depraved in all its faculties? Some may be disposed to inveigh loudly against Adam's conduct; and yet they tread in his steps, and transgress after his exam-

* Rom. v. 12—19.

ple. And, however others may quarrel with the appointment, by which we have eventually lost our primeval dignity, and have fallen into a state of degeneracy and ruin, yet their objections will not at all alter the case, or lessen the sum of human wickedness and misery. After all our debates, our condition remains the same; and, though we should reject the scripture account of the way in which we were brought into it, we shall not remove the difficulty by substituting any other system, unless we can prove, what is impossible, that man has suffered nothing by the fall, but is an innocent and happy creature. If the fact, therefore, be such, as universal observation and experience evince, that a fatal malady has come upon us, let us, instead of disputing about its origin, endeavour to ascertain its nature, to discover and apply the proper remedy. We inquire, what are our present circumstances; or rather we proceed to shew, that all our faculties are perverted, that the whole moral system is deranged,—all out of course.

We begin with the UNDERSTANDING, and consider whether its present state be not such, as to prove that it has lost much of its original excellence. Man is still distinguished by his intellect from all other creatures upon earth. We mean not to decry the use of reason, or derogate from its importance. It is an inestimable talent, which we should do well to cultivate, and exert

with diligence and fidelity, in the service and for the glory of its divine Author. But, while we praise God for the precious gift, we should be aware of its degeneracy, and the injury it has sustained by the fall. This is, indeed, what few persons are willing to admit; for there is no endowment, of which we are more disposed to be proud. So just is the observation of Zophar, "Vain man would be wise, THOUGH MAN BE BORN LIKE A WILD ASS'S COLT *." The description is instructive, but very mortifying. He aspires after knowledge which was never designed for him, and of which he is utterly incapable; he is conceited of his intellectual powers, as if they were able to discover and comprehend the nature, the attributes, and purposes of Jehovah †, and considers not, that, in subjects of a spiritual kind, he may be fitly compared to creatures the most ignorant and stupid. He is born so; and therefore this is universally the case, and results not from any peculiarly unfavourable circumstances, in which certain individuals may be placed. Like the animal here referred to, he is of himself, or without assistance, perfectly uninformed, as well as altogether untractable, foolish, and perverse in the extreme, and not to be taught any thing but by severest discipline. This, it should seem, was an acknowledged truth in Job's

* Job xi. 12.

† Job xi. 7.

time: may we seriously attend to it, and be deeply affected by it! There are various considerations, which may convince us of the universal corruption of our understanding, and our natural ignorance in divine things.

I. The state of the Gentile world, in every age and country, exhibits a clear and decisive proof. Wherever the light of divine revelation has not shined, or not continued to shine, there is no instance to be produced in which the pure worship or the right knowledge of the true God has prevailed. In all such cases universally men have been atheists or idolaters: their notions of a deity, if any, have been altogether gross and absurd, and their religious ceremonies accompanied with such indecencies, as the Christian must pronounce immoral and profane. Where men have been left to their own unassisted reason, they have invariably corrupted, and gradually lost, that knowledge of Jehovah, which he was pleased originally to communicate. When he made choice of Abraham to be the depositary of his truth, he found him, though a near descendant of Noah, in the midst of idolaters; and probably the patriarch himself also was a worshipper of false gods*. Of what sort have been the inhabitants of newly-discovered countries, in America, in Africa, in Asia, or the South seas? Are their

* Joshua xxiv. 2.

religious systems flattering to the pride of human reason? Or would they give us the idea, that man now possesses an uncorrupted understanding?

Nay, we need not fear to make the appeal to those nations, which have been most civilized, in which philosophy and all the sciences attained their highest state of cultivation and advancement, and where even the sacred volume was not altogether unknown. Will the most famous sages of Greece or Rome conduct us to true and heavenly wisdom? Their admired writings, from which it is confessed many excellent precepts of morality may be collected, evince the most deplorable ignorance in matters of greatest moment, and prove the apostle's assertion, that "the world by wisdom knew not God*." How black the picture which is drawn of them in their best circumstances, by the inspired author of the epistle to the Romans! and their own histories will shew that it is not overcharged. "They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened: professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,—and changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever†."

What then, we may ask, is that knowledge of

* 1 Cor. i. 21.

† Romans i. 21—25.

divine things, which fallen and unassisted man, by any exertion or cultivation of his own faculties, has ever attained to? What is it, which the light of reason has discovered? What is the so-much-talked-of system, the religion of nature? Where shall we search for it, but among those who have been left to the exercise of their own understanding? for they must afford a fair specimen: and what is there in this specimen, but that which is most humiliating to us, and proves us to be sunk into a very degraded state?

II. Places, favoured with revelation, exhibit the same thing. The truth of God, imparted from heaven, has never remained among any people, for a length of time, pure and unmixed: but mankind have always discovered a propensity to depart from it, or to corrupt it by superstitions and absurdities of their own, most dishonourable and debasing. Though divinely instructed and enlightened, they have been prone to relapse into all the follies and enormities of paganism, and have never been recovered but by the interposition of Jehovah, renewing his communications, and “reviving his work.” Let the appeal be made to the history both of the Jewish and the Christian church.

We might have thought it impossible, that persons, separated by miracle from all the nations of the earth, for the very purpose of knowing and serving the true God, who had beheld his glory,

and heard his voice, and received all the doctrines and precepts of their religion immediately from him,—that either they or their descendants should ever afterwards be so stupidly ignorant, as to bow down to wood and stone, and even to sacrifice to devils. But this we are assured has been the case; and it is extremely disgraceful to the human intellect: a case, which could not have existed, if there had been no corruption of that faculty.

The various apostacies, which have taken place among professors of Christianity, impress us with the same conviction. The state of the holy land, where the Saviour himself lived, and preached, and died;—the total destruction of the flourishing churches of Asia;—the awful declension even of protestants;—the tremendous examples of men “departing from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils *;”—all these prove incontestably, that man's understanding, which after the clearest information can “believe a lie,” must be debased and blinded.

III. This is confirmed by the declarations of holy scripture, which represent a divine illumination as universally necessary. The Lord God, who cannot be mistaken, has determined the case. Thus he speaks upon an accurate observation of the state of mankind, “There is none that under-

* 1 Tim. iv. 1.

standeth:—the way of peace have they not known *.” They may indeed be “wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge †.” This ignorance in spiritual things is not to be removed by any advantages of education, or the cultivation of the rational powers; for then the most learned persons would possess the largest share of heavenly wisdom, which is contrary to fact. For “the natural man,” whatever may be his acuteness of intellect, or his attainments in human science, “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; NEITHER CAN HE KNOW THEM, because they are spiritually discerned ‡ ” He must, therefore, implore assistance from above, and renounce all conceits of his own sufficiency. “If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise: for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God §.”

All without exception are described as being, in consequence of the fall, in a state of “darkness,” and only by conversion to God do any become “light in the Lord:” for “he shineth in their hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ||.” The Saviour came “to open the blind eyes,” “that they which see not might see:” and those,

* Rom. iii. 11, 17. † Jer. iv. 22. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

§ 1 Cor. iii. 18, 19. || 2 Cor. iv. 6. Eph. v. 8.

who pretend that their own reason is fully competent to direct them in all their religious concerns, so far vacate his office, and frustrate his grace: "they say, We see; therefore their sin remaineth*." The whole tenor of the sacred scriptures represents "the knowledge of the Lord," not as a mere human attainment, but as a divine gift, what the covenant of grace engages to bestow, and what we are instructed to implore by importunate prayer. Thus saith Jehovah to his church, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord:"—"And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them †." Instead, therefore, of presuming on any intellectual sufficiency, we are directed to confess our ignorance, and, in the diligent use of all appointed means, to wait for the light of heaven: "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God: for the Lord giveth wisdom ‡."

IV. This truth will receive further confirma-

* Isa. xlii. 7. John ix. 39—41. † Isa. liv. 13, applied in John vi. 45. Jer. xxxi. 34, applied in Heb. viii. 11.

‡ Prov. ii. 3—6.

tion from the case of real believers. They are uniformly spoken of as “called out of darkness into marvellous light *,” and as having that divine unction, which “teacheth them of all things †.” They say, “We ourselves also were sometimes foolish and deceived ‡ :” and, though “renewed in knowledge §,” they still feel and manifest the effects of the fall upon their understandings, so as to be betrayed into very gross blunders and absurdities. Accordingly, they confess and deplore their remaining ignorance, and hope that their “light will shine more and more unto the perfect day ||.” Such is their language, “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee!—Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man ¶ !” And their constant petitions are for an increasing measure of divine illumination: “Lead me in thy truth, and teach me! Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness **.”

Thus the apostles also pray for Christian converts, whatever might be their attainments, that “God would give unto them the Spirit of wisdom

* 1 Pet. ii. 9. † 1 John ii. 27. ‡ Titus iii. 3.

§ Col. iii. 10. || Prov. iv. 18. ¶ Psalm lxxiii. 22.

Prov. xxx. 2. ** Psalm xxv. 5. cxix. 18. cxliiii. 10.

and revelation in the knowledge of Christ ;—that they might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, —increasing in the knowledge of God *.” But how does all this accord with the high pretensions of those, who exalt human reason, and boast of the strength or clearness of their own unassisted intellect, in all religious concerns? Surely, they are not aware of the real state of things. “The light that is in them is darkness: and how great is that darkness †!”

V. Our conviction of the doctrine in question may be strengthened, by considering the extreme stupidity of men in general, as to spiritual things, even under greatest advantages. Let us advert to our own favoured situation. In addition to all our other privileges and means of instruction, we enjoy a free access to the sacred scriptures, which are the source of all true knowledge. The gospel, which “brings life and immortality to light,” is given to us in all its original purity: it is read, it is generally professed; it is preached with zeal and sincerity. How many faithful ministers of Jesus Christ are constantly dispensing the word of truth and salvation, which “is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ‡!”

* Eph. i. 17. Col. i. 9, 10. † Matt. vi. 23.

‡ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

Yet, after so many sermons, so much clear information, such wise counsel, and earnest exhortations, what are the effects produced? Are they at all proportioned to the means? Ah! how few among us seriously consider “the things which belong unto their peace,” or obtain any just views of them! Thousands, at least, remain as ignorant of the grand subjects of revelation, as if they had never heard of the Bible; so that each faithful minister is ready to adopt the lamentation of an ancient prophet, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*.” Many also, with professions of reverence for the sacred oracles, maintain and propagate the grossest errors, as contradictory to each other as to the truth; and vast multitudes, even with a Christian education, are presumptuously practising the most daring enormities. May we not ask, “Have they no knowledge?” Could they continue to act thus, if the human mind were not enveloped in deepest darkness?

There is a large proportion, we allow, of decent characters. But even among them we perceive a sad spiritual stupor, and an irrationality of conduct, as to their immortal souls. Very few of them discover any serious thought or contrivance to escape danger. What absurd preferences! What foolish hopes! Their plans and

* Hosea iv. 6.

pursuits, how inconsistent with a sound judgment! Their notions of God and his truth are often palpably false; and the contemptuous scorn and opposition, which the gospel not uncommonly meets with from them, afford the strongest arguments, that, however "the true light now shineth," their eyes are darkened that they see not, and "madness is in their heart*." Such things, at least, comport not with an uncorrupted state of the understanding.

From such considerations,

1. Let us be afraid of self-conceit. Its effects, at all times mischievous, are perhaps most to be dreaded in the subject before us. For this temper of mind "takes away the key of knowledge," and most fatally prevents all proper conviction. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him†." Such was Solomon's observation, and it is in exact harmony with the apostolic doctrine, that "if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know‡." The direction therefore is, "Let him become a fool, that he may be wise§." The Lord is determined to abase all human pride; and he refuses to communicate the light of his truth to those, who are not deeply conscious of their own igno-

* Eccles. ix. 3.

† Prov. xxvi. 12.

‡ 1 Cor. viii. 2.

§ 1 Cor. iii. 18.

rance, and desirous of receiving instruction with a child-like simplicity.

2. Let us be thankful for the gracious provision of the gospel, so exactly adapted to our necessities. In Jesus Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge * ;” and he hath promised that his Spirit shall abide with his church for ever, to “guide us into all truth †.” Are we willing to submit to his guidance, and implicitly follow his directions? It is a great mercy to be aware of our spiritual blindness : for then we shall thankfully comply with our Physician’s counsel, and “anoint our eyes with eye-salve, that we may see ‡.” The conviction we have received is a proof of some glimmering of true light in the mind, and an intimation that more will be given. For, according to the divine promise, “we shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord §.”

* Col. ii. 3. † John xiv. 16. xvi. 13.

‡ Rev. iii. 18. § Hosea vi. 3.

ESSAY XIV.

ON THE DEPRAVITY OF THE HUMAN WILL.

The nature and freedom of the will considered. Its depravity appears, inasmuch as man invariably chooses evil, from his very birth,—and is obstinately bent upon it;—which is confirmed by sad examples,—by scripture declarations,—by the tenth article of the church. Objections answered.

IN support of the doctrine of man's fallen state and his entire depravity, we have asserted that all his faculties are perverted; and we proposed to bring forward some strong proofs of this melancholy truth. It has appeared that his understanding is darkened, and that, in consequence, however he may boast of his reason and intellectual powers, he has uniformly run into the grossest absurdities, and embraced tenets the most foolish in the important concerns of religion. Now, with such a guide, what course might we expect him to pursue? If his understanding, so corrupted, take the lead, and its dictates be obeyed, we cannot look for any good. And, accordingly, his thoughts, dispositions, tempers, and line of

conduct, will evince him to be a sinful and very degenerate creature.

We proceed with our inquiries, and examine the state of the human WILL. This is, indeed, a noble faculty, by which he is constituted a free and a moral agent, accountable for his actions. It is the will, by which the mind chooses, or makes its election, out of the various objects or plans proposed to it: it is influenced doubtless by the understanding, but itself determines the preference to be given, the particular method of proceeding to be followed. It seems needless to prove that the mind must choose freely: for there can be no exercise, or even existence of the will, where the conduct is directed and governed by external force and constraint. Man, therefore, is certainly left to his choice: otherwise his actions are not his own, neither can any responsibility attach to him. But, waving all subtleties and nice distinctions, the simple question before us is, Does he choose as we might expect a pure and holy being to do? Does he uniformly prefer that which is good, and reject that which is sinful? Rather, does not the general tenor of his life prove, that his inclinations are of a corrupt sort, that his will is perverse, that of itself, without any foreign influence, it is obstinately bent upon evil from his very youth; in other words, that it is so by nature, or as he comes into the world? If this be the case, surely

we must allow, that the crown is fallen from our head. May we feel, as we ought upon this occasion, the deepest humiliation, shame, and godly sorrow ! We remark,

I. Man invariably chooses evil. The way of righteousness and of sin,—of life and of death,—are set before him. Now, to which does he incline ? Does there appear any bias in favour of that which is good and virtuous ? Are there any signs of that innate moral rectitude, which some boast of ? Is there even a perfect indifference of mind towards the objects proposed, so that it is at least as probable that his preference may be given to the right, as to the wrong ; or that he may be conducted one way, as easily as the other, by any persuasion or influence ? The contrary to all this must be our conclusion, from the following considerations.

I. Every man is a sinner. The incontrovertible fact is such, that of the whole human race no one individual has preserved that native innocence so much talked of. In all the successive ages of the world, in all the different climes and modes of education, amidst an endless variety of tempers, constitutions, situations, and habits, men have always shewn the same disposition to violate the rule of duty : and that rule has been sufficiently understood to prove the natural perverseness of their minds. We will not go about to search for evidence in support of a charge universally ac-

knowledge, and solemnly brought against us by God himself: "There is none righteous, no, not one:—they are all gone out of the way:—there is none that doeth good, no, not one:—that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God *." Such is the infallible testimony: but how strange and unaccountable is this, if there be no natural corruption of the will ! It is perfectly incredible, that out of the millions of the human species not one in any age or country is to be produced, who has always resisted the influence of bad examples, and persevered in righteousness;—or that bad examples should be universally prevalent, in every place from the beginning;—unless we allow, that by the fall the will has received a sinful bias, or that the mind is disposed to choose and pursue a vicious conduct.

2. Children always begin to sin very early in life. If the love of righteousness were natural to us, it would appear most unequivocally in the years of infancy, before bad habits are formed, or good principles can be corrupted by a connexion with the world. But are any children inclined of themselves to be truly virtuous ? Do they shew an entire freedom from all evil propensities ? On the contrary, let those, who are intrusted with their education, testify the difficulties and dis-

* Rom. iii. 10—19.

tresses occasioned by their perverse tempers, and the invariable tendency of their minds to vanity, folly, and criminal indulgences. Where is the parent who is not constrained to weep over the pride, the peevishness, the self-will, the refractoriness, and the falsehood of his offspring? They do not shew any thing in their minds, like a will originally pure and holy;—any natural preference of what is good and excellent;—but just the reverse: and the corruption of this faculty is visible in their tenderest years. As soon as they are capable of acting at all, they do wrong, and prove that it is in their hearts to do so. “They are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies*.” This depravity, so universally, and so early discovered, is not accidental, results not from any unfavourable circumstances, in which some children may be placed, but is common to the whole species, and evinces the evil propensity of their nature. Thus we should argue concerning any other animals, which should all appear from their birth to have one and the same tendency.

3. Man, left to himself, always perseveres in sin. Even under the strong restraints of a well-governed family, the instructions, admonitions, and corrections, the examples and prayers of pious parents, children will be perverse: but to

* Psalm lviii. 3.

give a full view of the corrupt bias of their will, they should be permitted to follow their own devices without any direction or control. It is not difficult to foresee what would be the consequence. No religious plans or resolutions would be formed : nothing truly excellent would be cultivated ; but every thing directly opposite. They would soon become vicious in the extreme, according to the opportunities they might have, and be the very pest of society. The experiment has been often made ; and the result, which is invariably the same, confirms the observation. Ah ! what confusion in families, what extensive mischief in the world, what anguish to the careless parent, does the neglect of education produce ! “ A child, left to himself, bringeth his mother to shame *.” This clearly shews the natural inclination, or the bent of the will. The corruption of the child arises not from external influence, the contagion of example, or the persuasions of bad companions, but from himself : it is only necessary for him to have full scope for the gratification of his wishes, and wickedness and ruin will follow. Thus also we are taught that “ the way of man is froward and strange † ;” it is always spoken of as opposite to God’s way ; and therefore the confession of universal transgression is thus expressed, “ We have turned

* Prov. xxix. 15.

† Prov. xxi. 8.

every one to his own way*." A certain proof of a depraved choice, and that from our very birth ! The depravity will also appear to be radical, and incurable by any human means, if we consider further ;

II. Man is obstinately bent upon evil. Trial has been made from the very beginning ; warnings have been given ; restraints imposed ; punishments inflicted ; but all have been ineffectual to correct this wrong bias of the mind. Man continues to advance, with presumptuous steps, to the commission of sin, and not even the dread of endless destruction deters him.

————— " Though wooed and awed,
Blessed and chastised, a flagrant rebel still !"

Dr. YOUNG.

In little more than fifteen hundred years the wickedness of the world had risen to such a pitch, that God determined to sweep away the inhabitants by an universal deluge. Yet, after his design was made known by an inspired preacher, commissioned for the purpose, and though his threatened vengeance was delayed one hundred and twenty years, to allow them time for repentance, none were restrained from their evil doings. They remained impenitent and obdurate, while the waters were gathering around them, and,

* Isaiah liii. 6.

eight persons only excepted, they were all destroyed.

We might suppose, however, that a purer race would spring up, who would not discover the same corrupt propensities. But the fact was otherwise: the very same perverseness immediately appeared, and the Lord himself spake of it, as a matter to be expected, in these strong terms, so apposite to our point, "For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth *." It is evident, then, from the testimony of this infallible witness, that the tremendous desolation of the flood had not eradicated the depravity of human nature, and that in consequence of this deep-rooted evil no judgments would of themselves be able to reduce the obstinate rebel to obedience. It is assigned as a reason, why the world should not again be drowned, that under every dispensation man would continue the same, his very nature being totally corrupt, his will perverse, "his heart" and all its "imagination," its thoughts, desires, propensities, and principles, being "evil," and that not through any bad habits, which he might contract, or through the influence of examples, to which he might be exposed, but "FROM HIS YOUTH," or by his very birth: the disease therefore is incurable. The knowledge and veracity of the observer forbid us to entertain a doubt of this truth.

* Genesis viii. 21.

Accordingly, subsequent ages do not give any more favourable views of the state of human nature. Iniquity has continued to abound; and certain instances of extreme obduracy are held up to our view, as if on purpose to shew us how abandoned we ourselves might be, if unrestrained or placed in circumstances of temptation. Thus Pharaoh, the persecuting king of Egypt, presumed to maintain a contest with Jehovah, and hardened his heart against all reproofs and denunciations, disputing the right, despising the power, and defying the vengeance of the Almighty Sovereign, till the feeble but daring sinner was overwhelmed in destruction.

The Israelites were favoured by divine dispensations of mercy above all the nations of the earth: but even their history throughout all their pilgrimage in the wilderness exhibits, in a striking point of view, the radical depravity of the human will, continually and obstinately bent upon backsliding. It is a black account. In contempt of all the miracles wrought for their deliverance and support, "they kept not his covenant, and refused to walk in his law. They sinned yet more against him;—they tempted God in their heart;—they spake against him;—when he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned, and inquired early after God:—nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and lied unto him with their tongues *."

* Psalm lxxviii.

Their posterity discovered the same contumacious disposition; and after various methods used for their amendment during many succeeding years, the case appeared desperate. They are thus addressed, “ Ah! sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters, that have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more; the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores *.”

As the last remedy, the Saviour of the world appeared; and nothing can prove more incontrovertably the strength of depravity in our nature, than the contemptuous treatment he met with. “ He was despised and rejected of men †.” His works of mercy were vilified; his offers of grace were scorned. Thus, therefore, he reproved, he threatened, he mourned over, obdurate sinners, “ How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and YE WOULD NOT!—YE WILL NOT come to me, that ye might have life ‡.”

What more need be added? Man turns away in proud disdain from all the glories of heaven

* Isaiah i. 4—6.

† Isaiah liii. 3.

‡ Matt. xxiii. 37. John v. 40.

brought before him, and rushes on with steady purpose to damnation. He has done so from the beginning, in opposition to the most solemn warnings, in defiance of the most tremendous inflictions of vengeance, in contempt of the everlasting salvation of God. And what would be his present character, if faithfully delineated? This is an enlightened age: the means of grace are afforded us in rich abundance: but there never was a time when sin stalked abroad with more daring effrontery; for it triumphs over all restraints, and sets at nought both the judgment and mercy of God. "Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil *." Ah! to how many in this Christian land may it be said, "They hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of his counsel; they despised all his reproof †!"

All the wickedness of the world, both past and present, is to be traced up to this source, the depravity of the human will. It is a polluted fountain, continually sending forth its bitter waters. It is an universal principle, confined to no age, or country, no rank, education, or character, but extending alike to all, and derived from our original lapse in Adam. This corrupt bias is, indeed, corrected, the "carnal mind" is subdued,

* John iii. 19.

† Prov. i. 29, 30.

the will is sanctified by divine grace, in all the regenerate. But even their case confirms the doctrine. We are instructed to exclude all influence of their own will in the holy change produced, and to ascribe it to another cause. Such are the accounts of the sacred writers: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power:"—"They are born, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God:"—"It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy:"—"It is God, which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure*."

On such declarations the church of England has grounded her tenth article, which lays down and maintains the doctrine in clear and strong terms, not to be evaded or explained away by any subtle and sophisticated comments.

Of Free-Will.

"The condition of man after the fall of Adam, is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God: wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will."

* Psalm cx. 3. John i. 13. Rom. ix. 16. Phil. ii. 13.

We see also the tendency of our fallen nature in all those, who are said to be abandoned of God. They always proceed from bad to worse, become more daring, obdurate, and unfeeling in wickedness, till they fill up the measure of their iniquities. But why is this? The Lord does not so harden the hearts of men, as by any positive influence to incline them to evil. But, in righteous judgment for mercies despised and abused, he withdraws his restraints: and then, being left at full liberty, they “give themselves over” to their favourite sins, and “work all uncleanness with greediness *.”

To the whole of this representation it is objected,

1. “If we have no power to do our duty, no blame can attach to us.” But the doctrine in question forms no excuse for any one sinful action, unless a very bad disposition of mind, and a determination to transgress, will be any vindication. It is quite the contrary. A common and proper distinction is made between natural and moral inability. If a man labour under the former, through the want or deprivation of his faculties, he will never be condemned for not using them. But the latter is no other, than such a prevailing love of sin, as indisposes him for

* Eph. iv. 19. See Psalm lxxxi. 12. Matt. xiii. 14, 15.

Rom. i. 24, 26, 28.

the practice of all righteousness; or in other words, it is a state of extreme wickedness. It is not only the source of all evil, but is of itself the just object of punishment. Plead not, then, the corruption of your nature in palliation of your guilt; but rather lie down in shame, with deepest humiliation, and self-abhorrence; for these are the tempers of mind which the subject calls for. Your inability, we repeat it, is the depravity of your will; on this ground we accuse you, and warn you of danger: "YOU WILL NOT turn, nor fear God." It is urged also,

2. "All exhortations and endeavours must be useless." So indeed they would, if God did not graciously interpose for our help. The calls and remonstrances of ministers would be altogether unnecessary and ineffectual. They might suffer men to sleep on in their sins without disturbance, as their case would be desperate. No persuasions, reproofs, or threatenings, will change the human mind. We need not say, therefore, that all our efforts will be vain: without divine grace no proper efforts will ever be made. But the subject before us should be considered in connexion with God's promises. The means, which he hath appointed, may, and should be used, in cheerful expectation of the blessing, which he has engaged to bestow. The ministers of his word must call sinners to repentance, trusting that he will work by them, and honour his own ordinance, for the

conversion and salvation of them that are ready to perish. On the same ground they may address all practical exhortations to Christians, and remind them, that their impotence will be no excuse for sloth; but that they should be roused to activity and diligence, in dependence on that grace which will subdue their wills to the will of God. Such was the apostle's inference, which will form the best application of the subject;—
“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure*.”
We pray, therefore, “O Lord, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Amen †.

* Phil. ii. 12, 13.

† Collect for Fifth Sunday after Easter.

ESSAY XV.

ON MAN'S DEPRAVED AFFECTIONS TOWARDS GOD.

The character of man must be collected from facts, as well as from the scriptures. What the affections are; and how exercised towards God. They are extremely depraved, as man is indisposed to think of God,—is averse to his service,—and shews the strongest dislike of his being and perfections, of his government, law, and gospel.

IN examining the state and character of fallen man, we are obliged to draw a very black picture, from which many perhaps may be disposed to turn away with disgust. But, if we would give a faithful delineation, we must consider, not what will please, but what the truth of the case is: and we would entreat a candid and serious attention to it, though the contemplation may, for the present, produce pain. Only let the view exhibited be compared with fact and experience, as well as with the declarations of the sacred writers, and let no conclusion be drawn in opposition to their united, explicit, and indisputable testimony.

In speaking of the corruption of the human mind, we have mentioned the perversion of its leading faculties, the understanding, the will, and the affections : and we now proceed to prove, that the last of these, as well as the former, are extremely depraved. They are not, indeed, essentially distinct from the will, but are only as so many vigorous and lively exercises of its inclination. By the will the mind chooses, by the affections it is carried out in pursuing or avoiding those objects, which it prefers or rejects. Without these, it should seem, man cannot act, at least with any degree of energy. These impulses, or passions, as we call them, are of various kinds, and differ in their strength, at different times, and in different persons ; such are love and hatred, desire and fear, joy and grief. Their effect is great in all human conduct, and their use would be most excellent, if they were not perverted. The question then is, Does man, in his present condition, love and hate, desire and fear, rejoice and grieve, as we might expect a holy and an innocent creature to do ? An attention to what we see around us, and feel within us, may be sufficient to convince us of the contrary. Our first inquiry is, How is he affected towards the ever-blessed and adorable Jehovah ? The consideration will evince the sad and entire degeneracy of our minds. For

I. Man is naturally indisposed to think of God,

The state of the mind may be ascertained, by observing the nature of those objects, to which it is most readily and most frequently directed, and which it appears most desirous to contemplate. But it is obvious, that, of its own accord, it is not turned towards God and spiritual things, as a pure and holy being would invariably be. Curious and inquisitive after other matters of a trifling nature, it desires not the knowledge of the Almighty, and rather avoids the study, as if it were offensive. If it should be compelled by urgent occasions to attend to the solemn subject for a time, how soon is it weary of it, throws it aside, and willingly forgets it ! Vain things, which cannot profit, are preferred and find a welcome reception, are dwelt upon with delight, are permitted and even solicited to occupy and engross the mind. This we may collect from observation, and the sacred scriptures will render the inference undeniable ; for they bring it as a charge against fallen man, that he “ will not seek after God ; that God is not in all his thoughts ; and that from within, out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts *.”

II. Man is, of himself, averse to the service of God. He is under indispensable obligations to offer continually the sacrifices of prayer and praise, and to practise all the duties of devotion,

* Psalm x. 4. Mark vii. 21.

And this is work, which, if he were not fallen and depraved, he would account his highest privilege, and which he would pursue with ardour and delight. Thus the blessed angels are not only described as obedient to all the commandments of Jehovah, and “hearkening to the voice of his word,” but also compared to “a flaming fire,” for the fervency of their love and zeal in his worship and service *. Thus it was with the first human pair in paradise; for they enjoyed an intimate and blissful communion with their Creator, till sin produced the sad separation. How different is the case with all their posterity! If man be at all occupied in spiritual employments, in the solemn adoration of his God, with what reluctance, heaviness, and stupor, does he move! He does not cheerfully obey the call to devotion, as he does that to the common business of life. It is evident, that he would rather decline the service, and the objections he raises against it shew the corrupt state of his mind, the alienation of his heart from God.

Take a view even of worshipping congregations: are all in those assemblies attentive, lively, rising toward heaven with holy ardour of affection? The frivolity of many, and the drowsiness of others, evident in their very countenances, prove that religion is not their element. They

* Psalm ciii. 20. civ. 4.

seem to complain as those of old, "What a weariness is it? When will the sabbath be gone*?" We observe no such listlessness as this in the theatre, the shop, or the market-place.

The inclinations, natural to man, must shew themselves in early life. The bent of the mind is very soon discovered in our children. But do they of themselves, without instruction, inquire after God? Do they delight to seek his face, and call upon his name? Nay, it is evident, that on these subjects especially, they are most unwilling to be taught. They manifest a strong aversion to spiritual duties: and very frequently the persuasions and entreaties, the menaces and corrections of a pious parent, will fail of producing in his beloved child an external compliance with the forms of religion; but truly religious they can never make him.

We shall be the less surprised at this, if we attend to the experience of good men, and hear their complaints of the depravity still remaining in them. They are renewed in the spirit of their mind, and by divine grace holy affections are produced and predominate in them: but what they feel of a contrary tendency, even in the worship of their God, is an irrefragable proof, that there is a principle in human nature, which dislikes the employment, and turns from it with

* Mal. i. 13. Amos viii. 5.

weariness and disgust. They are assiduous in the means of grace, they watch and pray, yet their hearts revolt, and afford them just cause for shame and sorrow in their best days and in their liveliest exercises of devotion. In waiting upon God, when they wish to be most composed and fervent, they cannot command their thoughts; they are beset with vain, foolish imaginations; they are violently assaulted and hurried away by carnal affections, which thus interrupt and defile their holy duties. They feel and lament, not only a general unaptness and indisposition to good, but a strong inclination to evil, and in an especial manner, at those very times, when they desire and strive to maintain a spiritual and devout frame of mind. Such are their confessions, “I was as a beast before thee: the good that I would, I do not; but the evil, which I would not, that I do: when I would do good, evil is present with me*.” These are not sinless infirmities, but sad and criminal corruptions, “vile affections,” which demonstrate our departure and estrangement from God. Ah! how suitable the acknowledgment and humiliation of an ancient saint, “Behold, I am vile:—I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes†.”

III. Man has uniformly betrayed, ever since the fall, the strongest dislike and a rooted hatred

* Psalm lxxiii. 22. Rom. vii. 19, 21. † Job xl. 5. xlii. 6.

of God, which has broken forth, as occasions have been offered, in impious speeches, perverse tempers, and profane practices, Larger opportunities have been given to some than to others, of shewing the disaffection and rebellion of their hearts against God; and not a few of these seem to have been set on an eminence, and permitted to go greater lengths in impiety, that they might exhibit a fuller view of human depravity. Such, we have remarked, was Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who denied the authority, and hardened his heart against the calls, the threatenings, and the judgments of Jehovah. Such was Ahab, king of Israel, “ who did evil above all that were before him, and sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord*.” Such also was Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, whose horrible profaneness provoked the Lord to confound and destroy him. But these, and similar characters, shew only what we are all capable of being and of doing, and the tendency of our common nature to act in contempt and defiance of the Lord God omnipotent, and even to maintain the most determined hostilities against him.

The sacred scriptures describe the whole human race as disregardful of God, as having cast off their allegiance, as traitors and rebels to his government. This indeed is implied in their being

* 1 Kings xvi. 30. xxi. 25.

SINNERS ; for every transgression is a denial of his authority, and an attack upon his throne. But it is expressly declared, that “ the carnal mind,” that is, the disposition of every man by nature, “ is ENMITY AGAINST God *.” Conversion, therefore, consists in having this enmity subdued, or the heart reconciled to the holy character and government of God : “ When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son †.” The gospel is accordingly called “ the word of reconciliation,” because thereby the Lord is pleased to make overtures to his revolted subjects, entreating them to throw down their arms, and to be at peace with him : and all, who truly submit to this call of grace, are thus addressed, “ You, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled ‡.”

This disaffection, which is rooted in our very nature, towards the ever-blessed God, manifests itself in various ways. Such is our depravity, that we dislike his very being. The language of the carnal heart is, “ There is no God :” or rather, this is expressive of its wishes, “ O that there were no God, to restrain, to govern, or to judge me § !” — His perfections or attributes, which constitute his character, are of such a sort, as in our fallen

* Rom. viii. 7.

† Rom. v. 10.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 18—20. Col. i. 21. § Psalm xiv. 1.

corrupted state we do not, we cannot, consider with approbation and delight. His unlimited knowledge, and minute attention to our inmost thoughts and principles ; his unspotted purity, and consequent abhorrence of evil ; his inflexible regard to truth, and determination to execute his threatenings ; his righteousness and equity, awarding to the sinner his exact desert ; these are offensive to us, we turn from them with pain and disgust, we try to disbelieve them ; and when constrained to admit his existence, we can scarcely repress the wish, “ O that he knew not, or cared not for us ! O that he were not so holy, just, and true ! O that he would make favourable allowances for his offending creatures, and not punish them with rigour ! ” Accordingly, men cannot bear that these parts of his character should be faithfully represented to them, and practically applied. They quarrel with and reject the account : they form a deity of their own, suited to their depraved taste and vicious inclinations, and thus prove themselves to be “ **HATERS OF GOD ***.”

This opposition to Jehovah appears more clearly in our dislike of his sovereign authority, and the government which he maintains. How few persons are satisfied with the wisdom, goodness, or equity of his providential dispensations !

* Rom. i. 30.

How general and how loud is the language of complaint ! If disappointed and afflicted, almost all are cavilling and murmuring at the measures of the almighty and uncontrollable Disposer, as if he had mistaken their case, or had done them an injury. They say in effect, “ What doest thou ? ” and “ Why hast thou made me thus * ? ” — But the extensive demands and strict prohibitions of his righteous law, which requires internal purity and the unremitting exercise of all holy affections, are more especially grating to our carnal minds ; and the objections urged against them betray the hostility and rebellion of our hearts. Who among us admires those spiritual precepts, which condemn an evil thought, temper, and desire ? Who can cheerfully subscribe to the equity of that sentence, “ The wages of sin is death † ? ” But if we say, “ This is too strict, it is unreasonable, and unjust ; ” or if we wish for a licence to transgress ; we must be disaffected to the Governor, as we dislike the measures of his administration.

The Lord God has come to our relief, in our sad state of guilt and ruin, by a wondrous revelation of mercy ; and it is supposed, that this displays the excellence and amiableness of his character in so strong a light, that all must be constrained to admire, and love, and serve him. But

* Dan. iv. 35. Rom. ix. 20. † Rom. vi. 23.

is the gospel universally received? Or is it cordially embraced by any, without the powerful energy of the Holy Ghost? However men, under the dread of perishing, may seem to wish for salvation, they “WILL NOT COME to Christ, that they might have life*.” The plan is far too humbling and too holy, to recommend itself to our depraved natures; and that we should object to these gracious proposals, and obstinately refuse submission to the Saviour, determining that “we will not have this man to reign over us †,” proves perhaps more convincingly than any other argument, the wretched state of our hearts towards God.

Let us meditate on the sad effects of the fall, with deepest sorrow and self-abasement. The picture is most humiliating; but let us not turn away from it: for if it be justly drawn, it is of importance that we view it with attention, and consider it in all its consequences. How different ought we to be in the tempers and principles of our minds! And different we must become, before we can enjoy communion with God, or be admitted into his kingdom. We must be made new creatures in Christ Jesus. Those vile affections, to which the natural man is subject, pride, impatience, unbelief, ingratitude, blasphemy, and despair, so hostile to God, must be renounced

* John v. 40.

† Luke xix. 14.

and overcome; and the opposite dispositions implanted in their stead. We must be willing to submit to him, whom we have resisted; we must love the holiness of his character, which we have hated; we must be cordially attached to his government, against which we have rebelled; and with ardent desire seek his presence, from which we have fled with contemptuous disgust. Thus reconciliation will be effected.

Ah! who shall undertake the arduous work? What power can be sufficient to accomplish it? All human exertions will be ineffectual: let us not presumptuously depend upon them. But an almighty agent proposes his gracious aid; and ten thousand witnesses can testify that his influence is fully competent to the task. What he has done for them, he can do for us. Let us humbly and fervently implore his immediate assistance, that "He may work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*." But if we still remain in a state of determined hostility, most assuredly he will fight against us, and our destruction will be inevitable. The irrevocable sentence will be pronounced, "Those mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me†."

* Phil. ii. 13.

† Luke xix. 27.

ESSAY XVI.

ON MEN'S DEPRAVED AFFECTIONS TOWARDS EACH OTHER.

Man is not affected towards his fellow-creatures, as a pure and holy being would be ; which appears from the general violation of all relative duties,—from the prevalence of envy,—from the sad and universal abuse of the tongue,—from the corruption of the world through lust,—from the general want of probity,—and from the malignant tempers which every where prevail.

GENERAL invectives against the wickedness of mankind are frequent, and often very unmeaning. Many evidently join in them without any deep consciousness of their own depravity, or penitential sorrow, but, as it should seem, with self-complacency and delight, in the gratification of a censorious and malignant disposition. The world, they say, is deplorably bad, but they “thank God that they are not as other men are.” They are therefore elated with pride on the comparison, and look down with contempt on those, whose ways and habits of sinning differ from their own, as if they did not all partake of one

common nature, the propensities of which are evil. They are unwilling therefore to allow the propriety or justice of charging them with that depravity, which we maintain to be inherent in all mankind. They know not how to join in such humiliating confessions, as that in Isaiah, "We are all as an unclean thing*;" they suppose the language to be far too strong for men of decent character and conduct, and adapted only to the case of the profligate and abandoned.

But the grace of God subdues this pride of heart, and so convinces a man of his numerous defects and entire corruption, that, however he may have been mercifully preserved from gross enormities, he is willing to be ranked with the most worthless of his species, if not "to take the lowest room." Such are the acknowledgments which have been made by persons ever accounted most amiable: such evidently were the views which St. Paul entertained of himself, though he had not been, what is called, immoral or profane. Whenever he is led to speak of the deplorable state and character of sinners, he seizes the opportunity of humbling himself, as upon a level with them, equally guilty and equally depraved. "Among whom," said he, "we all had our conversation in times past, and were dead in sins†." "Of sinners I am chief‡." "For we ourselves

* Isa. lxiv. 6.

† Eph. ii. 3, 5.

‡ 1 Tim. i. 15.

also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another *."

This confession of his own guilt implies a sad charge against others, and involves all mankind. All in their unregenerate state are described as blind to their true interest, and intent on gratifying sensual inclinations, as rebellious against God, and full of all vile affections one towards another. We confine our present attention to the latter consideration: evil tempers naturally predominate in men, destroying their mutual regard, peace, and confidence, and introducing the most wretched confusion into society; they are not actuated by the principle of "LOVE, which is the fulfilling of the law," and which would effectually preserve them from all malignant dispositions and injurious practices: but every where they betray a mistrust and dislike, a strong propensity to "bite and devour one another."

Is the charge just? This is the point to be inquired into. Is man, as a social creature, what he ought to be? Ah! how different! Has there been in any age of the world, or does there now exist, a nation or community, the members of which from cordial and disinterested attachment are invariably promoting each other's comfort and advantage? What does general experience

* Titus iii. 3.

testify? What do the sacred scriptures declare? The examination may be painful, like the probing of a wound, but it is necessary; and it should be patiently submitted to, whatever anguish it may excite. We should be willing and desirous to know the worst of our case, and pray earnestly for such a spiritual discernment, that we may obtain just views of our state and character. In our investigation of the present condition of man, or rather of human nature, we may remark

I. The general neglect and violation of relative duties. We stand connected with each other in various ways, and from these connexions various obligations result. The precepts of the second table expressly declare what we owe to our neighbours, that is, to all the different members of society. But are all these duly regarded? They are founded on that golden rule, which commends itself to every man's reason, "Whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*;" and they would be universally observed, if that love, which "worketh no ill to his neighbour †," maintained the entire and constant ascendancy in human nature. But what must our conclusion be, when we observe that men are every where shamefully violating these duties, and that there is not an individual, who has uniformly acted up to the spirit and the full demands of the law?

* Matt. vii. 12.

† Rom. xiii. 10.

In communities of states and kingdoms, is the divine ordinance of government duly regarded and improved? Or rather is it not grievously perverted and abused by those, who are in authority, to the purposes of their own inordinate ambition, covetousness, or sensuality; and with an insolent refractory disposition despised and resisted by those, from whom reverence and obedience are required? Ah! who can calculate the mischiefs, which have resulted from this source?

In domestic life also, where we are bound by closer ties, it is obvious that we have all failed of giving to all their due. Convenience, interest, and carnal affection, besides many worldly restraints, may sometimes preserve tranquillity and order in a family. But the influence of divine grace is necessary to regulate and sanctify the tempers of the different members of the house, that they may so dwell together in unity and love, as to "look, not on their own things, but also on the things of others*." Where this grace prevails not, there is no spiritual affection between husbands and wives, no mutual compassion and forbearance, no dwelling together "as heirs of the grace of life," no ardent desire to promote each other's eternal salvation. Parental duties are in like manner neglected. Authority

* Phil. ii. 4.

over children is not duly exercised, or from right motives ; instruction, discipline, vigilance, and prayer, are not practised with a view to their precious souls. In children too, how strongly is our depravity marked, by their reluctance to yield reverence and submission, by their ungrateful, treacherous, stubborn, and refractory dispositions ! Between masters and servants, is there a constant observance of what they owe to each other, as in the sight of God ? Is there justice and kindness on the one hand ? is there fidelity, diligence, and respectful obedience on the other ? The farther we extend our views, we only multiply the more our proofs of human depravity. An enlarged information therefore may tend to produce the greater humiliation.—Remark

II. The general prevalence of envy. This is that passion of the mind, by which we grieve at another's superior advantages or enjoyments, and upon the comparison feel discontented with our own situation. A base affection we must allow it to be ; it can have no place in a perfectly pure and holy breast. But who among all the sons of Adam does not experience its baleful influence ? Who is entirely satisfied and thankful with the lot assigned him ? Who can rejoice at the success of a rival : or, in the view of his advancement, bear his own depression with an undisturbed mind ? This is such a disinterested benevolence, as fallen man possesses not : and therefore the

world is filled with misery, with strife and contention, because no one can quietly bear that another should be preferred before him. This is not an accidental failing, or confined only to the basest characters. It is inherent in human nature ; for thus an apostle has determined, “ the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy *.” It is therefore reckoned among the works of the flesh ; those works, which mark our strong corruption, and to which all are prone †. And that “ charity, which envieth not, and seeketh not her own ‡,” is a plant of nobler origin, is no other than the fruit of the divine Spirit.—Observe

III. The sad and universal abuse of the tongue. The members of the body, as well as the faculties of the mind, are not under the control of reason, or subservient to the will of God. “ Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh §.” The general tenor of a man’s conversation evinces the state of his heart, as much as the usual produce of a tree discovers its kind or its nature. And in this case the fruit which is brought forth is so decidedly evil, as to prove the tree to be radically corrupt. Is it possible to calculate the extent of the mischief? Or who can say, that his tongue has not been perverted to many bad purposes? What are men’s general habits of intercourse? what their favourite subjects when

* James iv. 5.

† Gal. v. 21.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5.

§ Matt. xii. 34.

holding converse with each other? Not the high praises of their God, not their own eternal concerns, not “that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers *,” but every thing vain and foolish, if not injurious; the trifles of life, sensual gratifications, and the faults of their neighbours. Where is not the language of slander and falsehood, of bitterness and wrath, of strife and reviling, of lewd or profane wit, to be heard? Who among us has not sanctioned such conversation by his presence and his smiles? We are so accustomed to hear the holy name of Almighty God abused and blasphemed by most impious imprecations, that we feel not that horror which we ought.

Now this universal perversion of “the best member that we have” is the sad fruit, and an undeniable proof, of our extreme depravity. “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.” Ah! where is such perfection to be found? “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue amongst our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. The tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison †.” Can this belong to the character of a pure and holy Being? Consider

* Eph. iv. 29. † James iii. 2-8.

IV. "The corruption that is in the world through lust*." It has pleased God in his holy word to restrain and regulate the intercourse between the sexes ; and the limitations which He has affixed to the indulgence of their mutual desires are both wise and merciful. But the barriers erected are every where thrown down with a contemptuous violence : they rush on to their sensual gratifications with worse than brutal fury, in defiance of prohibitions, menaces, and inflictions of punishment ; for all these are insufficient to preserve order and decency in society : the restrictions imposed draw forth in copious streams the corruptions of the human heart. This, it is obvious, is one of the most abundant sources of wickedness and misery, and exhibits a lamentable proof that our passions are naturally inordinate, and under no proper control from reason or religion.

It is lust, which destroys every moral principle, and leads to the perpetration of every foul deed, which vitiates and tortures the human mind, and annually slays many more thousands than fall upon the field of battle. Let not these pages be polluted by a description of all the complicated evils introduced among us by seduction and prostitution, by fornication and adultery. But let us weep over the vast multitudes, whom

* 2 Pet. i. 4.

these are hurrying away to the entire destruction both of body and soul: and let us bewail the depravity of our common nature, which, when left to itself, to indulge its genuine propensities, invariably produces these tremendous consequences. The trial, which was formerly made with the ancient heathens, shews only what the result would be in every similar case; "God gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves*." He put not into them these vile affections, but only afforded them the opportunity of following their own vicious inclinations.

The view will be rendered still more gloomy, by taking into the account

V. The general want of honesty among men in their transactions with each other. The facts are so glaring, and the inference so undeniable, that it seems sufficient barely to mention the case. The world is full of fraud and robbery, which could have no place, if men were upright creatures. What do our prisons, our courts of justice, and almost all commercial dealings exhibit, but proofs of sad knavery, and of an universal disposition to overreach and oppress by the basest tricks, if not by force and violence? Why must our persons and property be constantly defended

* Romans i. 24.

by armour, by bars and bolts? Whence is it, that "sin sticketh close between buying and selling*?"

Why must such precautions be used in every bargain, that the man, who places implicit confidence in another, and guards not against deceit with suspicious vigilance, as if every one were a rogue, is condemned and laughed at for his total ignorance of the world? This want of confidence implies a general conviction, that there is no sound principle of probity and veracity in the world. And while we perceive this universal failure in one of the plainest duties of morality, among all ranks, and in all the nations of the world, shall we hesitate to draw the conclusion, that men are not affected towards each other, as they would be in a state of uncorrupted purity? Add to this

VI. The malignant tempers, which all feel, and which often break out in deplorable instances of violence. If our nature were not depraved, the world would every where exhibit pleasing scenes of peace and love. But is this the case? What do historians relate? What does observation teach? Destructive wars have prevailed from the beginning: men have delighted in bloodshed: and accordingly, those have been reputed the most illustrious of their species, who have been the most expert and successful in the dreadful

* Eccus. xxvii. 2.

arts of devastation and slaughter. Who have been so much celebrated by historians, orators, and poets, as those, who by their arms have spread terror and desolation on the earth? No nation has ever yet been discovered, which has enjoyed both internal and external peace for any considerable time: no people, however mild and gentle, who have not learnt systematically to fight, to tear, and to destroy. Look upon the numerous hosts rushing to battle; view the fields covered with the slain; and then say, what is the state of human nature.

In private life the case is not much better. For the sake of paltry advantages men eagerly proceed from robbery to murder. On the slightest provocations they are not to be pacified but by the opportunity of shedding a brother's blood: and this is justified on the principles of politeness and honour. We need not advert to barbarous nations, where the passions are not softened or restrained by learning or religion, though they would most properly exhibit man as he really is; but in our own favoured country, where, by the laws of government, society, and christianity, so many restrictions are imposed upon the malevolent affections, revenge is thought highly creditable; and he, that passes by a trifling insult, is despised as a poltroon. Where is the town not divided by faction? Where is the domestic circle, in which peace and harmony prevail at all

times, in which angry contentions and bitter animosities never find admission? In vain shall we search for a pure disinterested benevolence: the principle of love grows not on the soil of our unregenerate hearts, but it is altogether “the fruit of the Spirit *.”

The facts referred to are allowed, but not so the conclusion. Yet how is it possible, that such should be the past and present history of man, if he were not, from his very birth, deplorably corrupt? Or how shall we reconcile the notion of his native purity with the scripture account? “From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man †.” Accordingly, when God gives men up, they are “filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity;—covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful ‡.” “Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood:

* Gal. v. 22.

† Mark vii. 21, 22.

‡ Romans i. 29—31.

destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known*.”

The subject will teach us

1. To be thankful that human depravity is restrained. That it is so in ourselves, that it is so in others, is a great mercy, as preventing incalculable mischiefs. Whither might we have been hurried, into what horrible misery might we have been plunged, had we been left to our own sinful propensities! No man has been as wicked as he intended: but in various ways our plans are defeated, our wishes resisted, our vile affections counteracted; and thus only the intercourse of society and domestic quiet are preserved.

2. To be desirous of ascertaining our true character, and of knowing our guilt and danger, whatever they may be. We should, therefore, be minute and accurate in our examinations, lest we be deceived by the flattery of our own hearts. Painful discoveries will be made; but let us not shrink from them. They will endear to us the gracious provisions of the gospel. O how precious is the remedy to those, who understand their extreme depravity! It is a remedy, which thousands have found effectual; it is exactly adapted to our case, and calculated to relieve our every want; it is also freely tendered to us,

* Romans iii. 13—17.

and we shall have the benefit through faith in Jesus Christ. O let us instantly accept the grace, and with lively affections praise and glorify him for his mercy!

3. To contemplate with admiration and love the character of our dear Redeemer, as the perfect pattern of all righteousness. Does the view of our deformity excite disgust? Then let us turn with delight to him, who is "altogether lovely." He took upon him our nature, but he did not participate any sinful propensities. The most disinterested and enlarged benevolence, the most condescending kindness, the most entire forbearance and forgiveness of injuries, appeared in the whole of his tempers and deportment. "He went about doing good*." "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not†." He prayed, he died, for his very murderers. The comparison will not only instruct, but shame and humble us. How far distant from him are the most eminent of his followers! Yet we may rejoice in the efficacy of that grace, which will make us conformed to his image, and gives us the cheering hope, that "when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him, as he is‡."

* Acts x. 38.

† 1 Peter ii. 22, 23.

‡ 1 John iii. 2.

ESSAY XVII.

ON MEN'S DEPRAVED AFFECTIONS, WITH RESPECT TO THEMSELVES.

Man, considered in his individual capacity, appears a depraved creature, and actuated by wrong affections, as he is proud,—selfish,—foolish, weak, and inconsistent,—and carried away by sensual desires,

AS there is no doctrine of greater importance in the whole Christian system, than that of human depravity, there is none which is confirmed by more numerous or explicit declarations of the holy scriptures. While we advance in our plan, we meet with one testimony after another, conveyed in language too clear for any sophistry to evade, and all concurring in the same general evidence, that man has lost his original righteousness, that he is corrupt in all his faculties, and sunk into a state of extreme degeneracy. It has appeared in our inquiries, that his UNDERSTANDING is darkened as to all spiritual objects, that his WILL is obstinately inclined to evil, and that he is carried away from the path of rectitude by a variety of inordinate and base AFFECTIONS.

We have already considered him as thus actuated towards God and towards his fellow-creatures: but let us now view him in his individual capacity, without respect to those relations in which he is placed; and here also we shall be compelled to conclude, that his inward affections, desires, and principles, are altogether disordered and corrupt. Will any resist that conclusion, and maintain, from a fair examination of the state of their minds, with reference to themselves only, that all their passions, motives, and inclinations, are holy, spiritual, or even rational? There are such advocates for what is termed the dignity of human nature: but their system, if accurately investigated, will be found to be a compound of pride and ignorance, as irreconcilable with facts as with scripture, and in its effects most mischievous and fatal.

St. Paul acknowledges, that all men, till renewed by the divine Spirit, do feel and manifest, in the various exercises and operations of their minds, the most vitiated tempers and desires, to which they are abject slaves, and by which, from their very birth, they are offensive to God: "Among whom we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others *."

* Eph. ii. 3.

Such humiliating confessions are inconsistent with all ideas of native innocence, or an uncorrupted state of mind. Shall any, then, attempt to correct the apostle, as if he had formed too unworthy notions of himself or his fellow-creatures? Or will it be insinuated, that human nature is so much amended since his days, that the same descriptions are not now to be applied?—But our object in these essays is not so much to enter into dispute, as to ascertain right doctrines, and make a close and practical application of them. May every fresh view of the subject before us produce in us more genuine convictions of our total apostacy from God, and of our extreme defilement in his sight! Let the inquiry be conducted with seriousness and fidelity, and we apprehend that man will be found to be, among other parts of his character,

I. Proud. He is disposed “to think of himself more highly than he ought to think *.” He is not duly sensible of, nor properly affected with, his state, either as a creature, or a sinner. He possesses not the meekness and submission, which become him, but claims a consequence, to which he can have no just pretensions. If, in the dispensations of divine Providence, he be favoured with any superior privilege or advantage above others, it is not difficult to perceive that his

* Rom. xii. 3.

foolish heart is elated. How apt is he, in such circumstances, to look on those below him with supercilious disdain, as if he were of a higher species, and even to forget his dependence upon the Almighty, saying within himself, "I am," as if he should never be cast down *!

A disposition this, most odious and most unsuitable for so weak, and precarious, and short-lived a creature. "Pride was not made for man †." It is very offensive to God, whose rights it invades or denies. "He will not give his glory unto another : " and therefore "He resisteth the proud ‡." Thus Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, and Herod, are held up to our view as examples of arrogance, and of the divine displeasure against it : and yet they exhibited only the tendency, which is in every man's heart, when exalted, to swell with the vain conceit of his own excellence and importance. Hence it is, that power, riches, beauty, strength, and learning, are always dangerous to the possessor : for they are so, chiefly as man is proud. And be it remembered, that pride is satanical : it is the distinguishing feature of Satan's character, and it proved his destruction. We are therefore warned, lest, being "lifted up with pride, we should fall into the condemnation of the devil §." This is

* Isaiah xlvii. 8.

† Eccclus. x. 18.

‡ Isaiah xlviii. 11. James iv. 6. § 1 Tim. iii. 6.

but little considered : many flatter themselves that they are virtuous, because they are not grossly sensual ; but such an inordinate self-esteem, which may consist with external decency of conduct, with the favour and even the admiration of the world, is the disposition, not of a holy, but of a fallen and depraved creature.

Man discovers this pride of heart, in a still stronger degree, and where it is more detestable, on spiritual subjects : exalting himself in the conceit of qualifications and attainments, which he does not possess. He puts in his claim to wisdom and discernment, though his understanding be darkened ; he boasts of his purity and goodness, while his “ heart is desperately wicked,” and his life stained with innumerable transgressions ; he demands the notice and favour of heaven for his supposed merit, when he ought to bow in the dust and deprecate deserved punishment ; he is elated with the idea of his own sufficiency to do the whole will of God, though totally void of all spiritual energy, without strength as without righteousness, and incapable of executing or forming one holy purpose of himself. What a compound of inconsistencies is here ! Yet such is every man by nature. No one understands his true character, or possesses the humility which becomes a sinner, till the divine Spirit enlighten his mind, awaken his conscience, put an end to all his proud boastings,

and fill him with shame and self-abasement. Yet, till this conviction and humiliation be produced, the heart is in a wrong state, and is most offensive to God. He has determined, "that no flesh shall glory in his presence*;" and therefore it is an unspeakable mercy to us, if our haughtiness be subdued; for "the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit †."

Man is also

II. Selfish. This indeed follows from the former consideration. Elated with the idea of his own consequence and merit, he deifies himself, and to this idol he not only offers incense and worship, but requires the same adoration from others. Upon every occasion, therefore, he is ready to claim precedence; and where this is denied him, how seldom is it that he does not feel irritation and resentment! He sets up his own will, as his rule of action, and is accordingly impatient of restraint. The language of his heart is, "Why cannot I live as I please? Who is lord over me?" The convenience of others, if consulted at all, must always give place to his own; nor will he scruple to sacrifice their dearest interests, for the attainment of some beloved object, which he has marked out for himself. Who, that is conversant with the world, does not find

* 1 Cor. i. 29.

† Psalm xxxiv. 18.

continual cause to lament in mankind this inordinate, mean, and base attention to their own private emolument and gratification? And will it not be allowed to be a proof of universal depravity, that men should be “lovers of their own selves *?” It is a disposition of mind directly opposite to that exalted principle of love, which “vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own †:” and love, not selfishness, must discriminate the character of every rational creature not perverted by sin.

Upon a further investigation, man will appear

III. Foolish, weak, and inconsistent. He boasts of his enlarged and vigorous intellect, and of his strong reasoning powers; nor is it designed in this delineation to degrade him from that high rank, which he possesses in the scale of creation. He is endowed with wonderful faculties. His understanding is comprehensive; and, by a diligent culture of his natural abilities, he is capable of rising to great attainments in science. But does he always improve his reason, or act suitably to it? Does he maintain his dignity by a propriety of conduct? Ah! how different is the case! What grievous absurdities and mischievous follies prevail among the generality of our species! Without adverting to the very degraded state, in

* 2 Tim. iii. 2.

† 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5.

which, scarcely differing from the beasts of the field, millions of the human race are content to live and die, let us take our estimate from the polished orders of society, where literature flourishes, and judge of their propensities by their favourite pleasures and amusements. Let us accompany them to their most crowded resorts, and examine, what are those things in which they place their chief delight; what their tendency and effect. We should be ready to conclude, that reason has lost its dominion, or, however it may counsel, that it is unable to enforce its dictates, and that all, at one time or another, are in the habit of rebelling against its authority. The desires and affections disdain control, and break through all restraint, in consequence of which there is confusion and disorder within every breast. Man may discern some grand outlines of duty, and form excellent plans for his own direction: but he is unable to resist temptation, or act up to his strong convictions. He is therefore feeble in his efforts, treacherous to himself in violating his best resolutions, and unstable in all his plans of moral conduct. The heathens felt and lamented this degeneracy.

“ Quid enim ratione timeamus,
Aut cupimus ?” JUVENAL.

———“ Video meliora proboque,
Deteriora sequor.” OVID.

“How void of reason are our hopes and fears!”

“I see the right, and I approve it too,
Condemn the wrong, and yet the wrong pursue.”

Will not Christians also confess and deplore this principle of depravity, which often betrays them into the grossest inconsistencies? Such is their general experience: “The good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.—When I would do good, evil is present with me*.”

We shall not therefore wonder at any excesses we may witness in the world; but these will furnish another proof of man’s depravity, in that he is

IV. Sensual. The senses and appetites of his body were given him for noblest purposes, but are now so entirely perverted, that each one of them is the inlet of temptation, and the source of incalculable wickedness and misery. They form the lowest part of his nature, and should be subject to the higher, to his intellectual and rational powers. But instead of obeying, they bear rule: a sure sign of his sad degeneracy. He is therefore sunk down into flesh, and as a fallen creature he is called **FLESH**, denoting the carnality of his mind, and the devotedness, even of his spirit, to the grossest animal enjoyments.

* Romans vii. 19, 21.

Take a view of human life, and what disgraceful scenes does it present ! Almost all, from their birth, are inordinately attached to appetite in one way or another, and eagerly seeking the gratification of their sensual lusts, as their highest felicity. From the general pursuits of the world, it might seem as if the body were the whole, or the best part, of man. His carnal passions importunately solicit, or rather imperiously demand, indulgence. Reason and conscience may unite in loud remonstrances ; strong barriers may be erected to prevent access to the desired object ; but the passions rage with brutal force, break down every barrier, and sacrifice all considerations of honour, interest, health, and even the salvation of the immortal soul, to please the appetite and to satiate a beloved lust. Hence what secret impurity, and vile concupiscence ! The body is dishonoured, as well as the mind degraded. Extravagance, dissipation, and excess, the filthiest practices of gluttony and drunkenness, as far as opportunities are given, every where prevail, and spread disorder and transgression throughout the world. All persons, indeed, are not equally capable of this gross sensuality : many are compelled to abstain through indisposition or infirmities of age ; but in general we do not find men objecting to these indulgences, firmly resisting temptation, or pursuing a settled plan of self-denial, from any high or holy principles.

Is this then the creature, who boasts of his native purity, innocence, and moral dignity? From such views shall we conclude, that he is spotless, as he came out of the hands of his Creator? Rather let us confess, that he is fallen very low indeed. Let each one make application to himself, and from a painful recollection of the various corruptions, which have maintained the ascendancy in his own mind, cry out with an eminent saint of old, "Behold, I am vile*!" Even those, who have not been injurious to others, and may plead their honesty, cannot say, that "they have made their hearts clean, or that they are pure from their sin†." To all therefore, without exception, belongeth shame and confusion of face.

This doctrine claims the peculiar attention of parents, with a reference to the education of their children. How important is your trust, to whom is committed the instilling of right principles into young and unfurnished minds! Beware that you do not cherish in them any ideas of their own natural goodness or sufficiency. Flatter them not, that they are uncorrupted, and as free from moral stains, as the pure white paper is from blots; but rather apprize them, that they will find religion to be an arduous business, chiefly from the disordered state of their own affections,

* Job xl. 4.

† Prov. xx. 9.

and that they will have occasion for incessant prayer, vigilance, and humiliation, because "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked *." O warn them of their evil propensities, and unruly passions; and guard them especially against pride and selfishness, folly and sensuality.

In your great solicitude also for their progress and establishment in truth and righteousness, be not surprised that you meet with many obstructions. From the universal depravity of nature it must follow, that they will never grow up to be wise, virtuous, and holy, without continual instruction, and the painful discipline of correction. You must not, therefore, be discouraged, though your efforts for a long time seem to fail. Against many unpromising appearances renew your charitable endeavours, imploring and expecting success from divine grace alone. But how inexcusable will you be, if you leave them to themselves, to gratify the vile affections of their hearts without control! And how perfectly inconsistent will be your conduct, if, while you profess to believe the doctrine of human depravity, you expose them to temptations, as if there were no evil tendencies in their nature!

The subject calls for penitential sorrow, but it need not drive us to despair, while we have

* Jer. xvii. 9.

the gospel in our hands. The deepest conviction of our own vileness should not prevent us from prayer, or exclude us from hope. Many as our corruptions are, we are assured that the Saviour can extend to us sufficient grace, the full forgiveness of our sins, and the renovation of our hearts in righteousness. Let us thankfully accept his invitation, and depend upon his proffered aid : and most undoubtedly the blessing will be our's. Yet, though justified from all things, and rejoicing in hope of complete deliverance “ from the body of this death *,” we should “ go softly all our years ;” for such humiliation becomes our state and character. Hear the divine admonition ; “ That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God †.”

* Rom. vii. 24.

† Ezek. xvi. 63.

ESSAY XVIII.

ON MAN'S DEPRAVITY, IN HIS IMAGINATION,
JUDGMENT, MEMORY, AND CONSCIENCE.

Man's depravity appears in the perversion of his various mental faculties—in his imagination,—in his judgment,—in his memory,—and in his conscience, which is often erroneous, weak, and callous.

TO ascertain the state of the human mind, it is proper to consider its various faculties, and their respective use and application. We are not depreciating their value, or their original excellence. Let them be esteemed as the workmanship of God, calculated to promote the noblest purposes : but with all reverence for the Creator, we may pursue the inquiry, Are they pure and uncorrupted? Do they answer their primitive design? Have they undergone no change? Or have we not abused and perverted them all, even from our earliest years? They remain, indeed, as so many stately pillars of an edifice, once magnificent, but now in ruins; and remind us perpetually of the deplorable desolations which sin has introduced.

Previous to men's acceptance of the gospel, they are said to be in such a state of pollution, that to them "nothing is pure;" all their actions are unclean; and only by an application to the "fountain opened for sin," can their filthiness be removed: their heart is under the influence of wrong propensities and vitiated principles: in the strong language of St. Paul, "even their mind and conscience is defiled *." In addition to what has been already advanced, the defilement of fallen man will further appear

I. In his imagination. By this wonderful power, the mind can represent to itself an infinite variety of pictures, merely in idea, can bring near to its view things absent and most remote both in time and place, and give a seeming reality and importance to things which never existed. It can take an extensive and rapid excursion through all the subjects which have ever engaged its notice, or of which any conceptions can be formed; and it will travel in a moment, and almost imperceptibly, from kingdom to kingdom, and from one world to another. The advantages of this faculty are great; but much of our present happiness or misery depends on the manner in which it is employed. Our various characters, and the state of our souls before God, may also be determined by this very mark. "They

* Titus i. 15.

that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit*.”

The question now is, Are the tendencies and exertions of the imagination such, as we might expect them to be in a pure and immaculate being? Are they not far otherwise? For what are the ideas, which most frequently offer themselves, which the mind turns to with greatest readiness, and dwells on with most ardour and delight? Are they always useful, rational, or innocent? How much vanity and folly occupy the thoughts, not only in children and the uninstructed, but in persons of mature age and of the best education! Nay, even in real and eminent Christians, what absurd reveries find admission and indulgence, and with what difficulty are they prevented or dispersed! But the case is still worse. There are “chambers of imagery” full of abominable filthiness; vile suggestions engage and perplex the mind; sins, which have been renounced, present themselves to the imagination in some fresh and pleasing form, and, ere danger is suspected, they are received through this inlet, they are acted over again in secret, and contemplated with satisfaction.

Who among us has not perceived and lamented this internal defilement? Who has not sustained

* Rom. viii. 5.

much spiritual loss in consequence of this inmate opening the gates to the enemies without? Let us hear the call of God, who “understandeth our thought afar off,” and requires truth and purity even in our meditations, “Wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee*?”

Ah! how great is the guilt we have contracted! “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults †!”

Consider, too, what man has suffered by the fall

II. In his judgment, or in the power, which he possesses, of comparing different ideas, and of discriminating between them. Now, if our minds be uncorrupted, this faculty will not be perverted; and then our conclusions and determinations will always be just and right. We shall not mistake falsehood for truth, nor give a preference to any objects, but according to their real value. Here then we institute the inquiry again, Is this the state of things at present? and we hesitate not to affirm, that man shews the strong influence of depravity, in the decisions of his judgment.

It is but an evasion to say, that, if he would consult reason and lay aside his prejudices, his determinations would not be vitiated. For where is the individual, who has done this at all times? And that every one should be so misled, as to

* Jer. iv. 14. † Psalm xix. 12.

favour vice, proves that there is not only much weakness, but a sinful bias in the mind. How otherwise can the state of things be accounted for? Why is there so much error in the world? Why such absurd partialities? Why such inconsistency of conduct? Examine men's general sentiments, pursuits, and practices, and then ask, Where is their boasted faculty of judging? Is it not uncertain; as they differ so widely on the plainest points? Or is it not weak; since they act in such a constant opposition to its dictates? Or is it not perverted; when it appears daily, that they are warped in their reasonings, and hurried to unfair conclusions by wrong affections?

If we were not liable to be led away by an innate principle of depravity in the exercise of the judgment, where would be the need of incessant caution and watchfulness? Why should we be so perpetually warned of our danger? "The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps *." Therefore, "He that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool †." And hence only it is, that the wisest and the best of men should be afraid of imposing upon themselves by false and unjust decisions, and should pray for divine teaching and direction: "O give me understanding; and teach me good judgment and knowledge ‡!" When this holy diffidence is

* Jer. x. 23. † Prov. xxviii. 26. ‡ Psalm cxix. 34, 66.

not maintained, we fall into sad mistakes : and who, that looks back on the years past, will not allow, that he has smarted for his folly, his pride, and precipitation ?

Man, as a fallen creature, has suffered also

III. In his memory. This is the faculty, by which the mind can retain or revive impressions, which it has once received. Its advantages are immense ; for it is the source of all knowledge, as it enables us to lay up our ideas and conclusions as in storehouses, and to draw them forth at pleasure, as occasion may be given, or necessity require. The loss or failure of the memory is, therefore, always considered as a grievous calamity ; and there may be a partial or a total defect, without any implication of guilt. The facility of recollection may be greatly impaired by age or sickness : by a fever or paralytic attack, the whole stock of knowledge, which it has been the business of a life to acquire, may be in an instant obliterated. But we are now to consider, whether the effects of the fall, as introducing depravity, do not appear in the memory : and we apprehend they do so, not merely in its general weakness, but

1. In the readiness and delight with which informations of a bad tendency are retained, and impressions, exciting sinful affections, are revived. It is obvious, that we are apt scholars in learning what is vicious, and that we do not easily forget

whatever of this kind we have once admitted. The mind is perpetually turning itself, and with evident satisfaction, to view its worst ideas. The revival of them is not difficult; but they recur, and often with a sort of hateful violence, even to good men: they recur to them at the time, and then perhaps with greatest force, when they most ardently wish to banish the remembrance. This is a strong proof of depravity, which the most holy saints contemplate with grief and horror, as interrupting and defiling their best of duties. This also appears

2. In the extreme difficulty, with which good instructions preserve their place in the mind, or are recalled to view when most of all wanted. The impressions made by spiritual and divine things are weak and faint, compared to those which are produced by the suggestion of vilest principles, and scenes of shameless transgression. Or, if for a few moments we be deeply affected by a striking representation of the solemn truths of God, and the concerns of the immortal soul, how very soon is the influence lost or impaired! In a short time the characters are so far effaced, that they are scarcely to be found. The remembrance, therefore, does not recur; it is not, at least, recovered without amazing pains, and not without considerable diminution of its force. The most interesting texts of scripture, or the most awakening sermons, whatever effects they may

produce upon occasions, are much sooner forgotten than a wanton song, the tale of slander, and profane imprecations. Hence the propriety of the apostolic injunction, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should LET THEM SLIP*." The expression implies the readiness of the mind to part with the most valuable instructions : and this cannot be the property of a holy, uncorrupted creature. Ah ! with what abundant cause does this furnish us for humiliation, vigilance, and prayer !

We may add, that proofs of man's fall and depravity appear

IV. In his conscience. He is so constituted, as necessarily to sit in judgment upon his own actions, and to pass sentence upon them, according to some standard or rule of duty. The faculty, by which we acquit or convict, applaud or condemn ourselves, is called conscience. It presides, like an arbiter invested with great authority, and forms its decision upon the conduct whether good or evil. It is seated as God's viceroy in the soul, and possesses amazing influence. It counsels and warns ; it restrains and punishes ; or it supports and rewards. But excellent and glorious as this moral faculty was in man's original formation, and great as its advan-

* Heb. ii. 1.

tages still are, it plainly discovers in its present state the sad effects of our apostacy from God. For examine, Is this arbiter always or generally right in its decisions? Does it maintain its ascendancy, and cause its voice to be revered? No; on the contrary, it is often

1. Erroneous. There must be some previous instruction, some knowledge of the rule of duty, before it can execute its office. If this rule be mistaken, or a false standard set up, the judgment delivered will not be conformable to truth. And how large a portion of the human species are, and ever have been, involved in gross ignorance and error! Whatever may be said of the sufficiency of reason and the light of nature, have all the heathen nations actually understood what they owed to God and to one another? "Their conscience," indeed, "has borne witness, and their thoughts have accused or else excused *." Even in them, amidst all their corruptions, there has been a testimony given in favour of virtue, at least as to certain grand points: but surely the state of conscience among heathens is such, as to prove that man is miserably sunk and degraded. Do not thousands justify and applaud themselves for what is vicious in the extreme? In different countries very opposite notions of right and wrong prevail; and therefore conscience con-

* Rom. ii. 15.

demns in one, what it approves in another. Is this no mark of a perverted mind?

The only infallible rule of duty is the revealed will of God. This is plain and simple: yet even among those who are favoured with this revelation, does not conscience often judge erroneously? Many very highly esteem themselves for that, which “is abomination in the sight of God *;” and not a few have thought that they were “doing God service,” by the persecution and murder of the most excellent of the earth †. In this way, men sin as it were conscientiously. Multitudes of professed Christians, with tempers and practices most unholy, flatter themselves that they stand high in the divine favour. Ah! what wretched deceit is this! and yet they boast that their conscience pronounces their justification. Is this the sentence of an uncorrupted judge?

But where it is not erroneous, it is generally

2. Weak. There are times and occasions, in which it is roused to do its proper work; and then it constrains the most careless to hear its voice, and respect its authority. It arrests, it terrifies, appals, and confounds the most obdurate sinner, even on a throne ‡.” By its checks, and reproofs, and menaces, it restrains the violence of men, and contributes to the peace and good order of society. But there is still a sad

* Luke xvi. 15. † John xvi. 2. ‡ Belshazzar, Dan. v.

defect. In very many cases, it is bribed, and soon silenced; and most commonly it betrays a want of vigour or of influence. It resists our evil inclinations in a partial manner, some and not others, and in so feeble a way, that its restrictions are easily broken through. It stands to chide and check the offender; but it speaks with a low tone, and recedes from its opposition. If it be not thus, how shall we account for the general ease and apparent insensibility, with which men continue to sin? If conscience were strong and vigorous, they would tremble and howl for anguish. But the heart is become a heart of stone*. Hence we may add, that it is often

3. Callous or unfeeling. The tremendous case is described by St. Paul, when he speaks of some, "who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness †;" and of others, who "have their conscience seared with a hot iron ‡." The faculty indeed does not lose all its sensibility, and become totally obdurate, till it is wearied and exhausted by making ineffectual remonstrances. But that it should ever sink into such a state, and that it is always overcome by resistance, that every man left to himself, to pursue his own plans, and gratify his wishes, should be released from its control, and at length possess a hard

* Ezek. xi. 19. † Eph. iv. 19. ‡ 1 Tim. iv. 2.

and a reprobate mind; is a lamentable effect and a decisive proof of our depravity.

Let it not be inferred, that we would derogate from the excellence or the worth of conscience. Defective as it is, it still answers the most valuable purposes. It should be revered, consulted, and attended to. But it has sustained an immense injury in the general convulsion produced by the fall: and we ought to be aware of, and to weep over, the sad desolations of our nature.

The whole of this subject should teach us to pay attention to the state of our minds, and to be humbled, not merely for our outward actions, but for our inward depravity. How much defilement cleaves to us, in the exercise of every faculty! They are all alienated from the service of him, who formed them for himself; and this alienation, as it is offensive to him, should abase our pride, and fill us with unfeigned shame and deep sorrow of heart.

Yet hope breaks in upon us with a cheering light, amidst the ruins of the fall. The gospel proposes a remedy adapted to the case, sufficient to repair the mischief, and intended to renovate every faculty of the mind. When the man is created anew in Christ Jesus, the imagination, judgment, memory, and conscience, being sanctified by the grace of the Spirit, will be directed to their proper end, and be rendered subservient to the glory of God. O wonderful effect of di-

vine power and mercy ! The change indeed is imperfect here ; but it is in a state of progress, and the Christian shall soon appear complete in holiness.

We mourn for the state of those, who do not perceive and lament the sad perversion and abuse of all their mental powers. Infatuated sinners ! Have you no forebodings of the misery that awaits you ? Are you content to live and die without God, and without redemption ? We would awaken your fears by a representation of “ the terrors of the Lord.” O take the alarm ; “ flee from the wrath to come ;” and fervently implore the grace which is tendered to you by Jesus Christ !

ESSAY XIX.

ON THE MISERY OF MAN AS A SINNER.

Sin has introduced much misery into the world.—

There is a general dissatisfaction among all ranks.—Man is continually liable to calamities and bodily afflictions,—experiences great disquietude in his mind,—and as a mortal creature is unhappy, dreading futurity.

MAN, having sinned, was turned out of paradise. He lost his happiness, when he lost his innocence : and from that period the earth has groaned under the load of human wretchedness, as well as of human guilt. Every individual of Adam's race is corrupt from his very birth, and, as the necessary consequence, or rather as the righteous infliction of a just and holy God, is doomed to suffer. Misery has pervaded the whole habitable world, and seems attached to our nature. Such is the description given by St. Paul, not of a few persons involved in peculiar calamities, but of all men as being " under sin : " " Destruction and misery are in their ways ; and the way of peace have they not known *."

* Rom. iii. 16, 17.

This is not so much a doctrine of revelation, as it is a fact, which universal experience attests; and it is a truth level to the understanding and observation of all. We must perceive and lament it with respect to others, and we are constrained to feel it in our own case, however favoured our lot may be. From the character already drawn of fallen man, what could we expect him to be, but that which we really find him? a degraded and unhappy being, continually subject to disappointment, weariness, and vexation, pursued by terrors, stung by keen remorse, often plunged into perplexities and distresses, from which he can obtain no release, and, like a condemned malefactor, waiting with anguish and horror the execution of his sentence!

Or again, if we reverse the argument, may we not, from an actual survey of the miseries of human life, fairly conclude, that we are in a fallen state? that we lie under the displeasure of Almighty God? And is it not obvious, that sin must be the cause of his displeasure, and the source of all our woe?—These meditations may be suitable and useful, as tending to produce in us sincere contrition and deep humiliation of heart. Alas! what has sin done! how has it defaced and desolated the beauties of this lower creation, and turned the paradise of God into a waste howling wilderness, a vale of tears, and the shadow of death!

Attending, then, to what passes in the world, and appealing to what every reader feels in his own breast, we do not hesitate to maintain the position, that man is not that happy creature we might expect him to be, if he were not a sinner and depraved by nature: and in confirmation of it, let the following obvious and melancholy truths be seriously considered.

I. There is a general dissatisfaction among all ranks of men, and in all the various circumstances of life. The desire of happiness is universal, and we see thousands pursuing it with unbounded ardour and expectation. Young persons especially are fascinated by the world, and suppose that it is capable of giving them full content. There is also among the votaries of pleasure a vivacity and a glee, from which a distant spectator might conclude, that they have attained their object. But a nearer view will undeceive us, and prove to us that their wishes are not gratified, that their schemes always fail in some respects or other, and that their real enjoyments never answer their hopes. Many of them have honestly confessed, even in their full career, and while giving a loose to every desire of their hearts, that they were “disgusted and chagrined, and often truly wretched*” And even those, who will not grant the unwelcome truth, sufficiently declare it by their restlessness, conti-

* Colonel Gardiner, Lord Chesterfield, &c.

nually changing their plans, roving from object to object, and racking their invention for something new. None of them can say, I have found what I wanted.

The language of complaint and murmuring is to be heard, not only among the poor, and those who have been tumbled down from rank and opulence into deep affliction, but from those, who yet stand on an eminence, and seem to have every thing at command. Something is still denied them, or there is some impediment in the way, which prevents their happiness. And were the state of their minds better known, they would not be regarded with envy. They feel an emptiness and a disappointment in the midst of all their abundance, and with every possible accommodation. Their titles, their equipage, their extensive domains, rather create than satisfy desires, increase their cares and perplexities, but can never secure their peace.

Let one instance suffice instead of a thousand : and it is one, which it should seem God himself has selected and held up for our admonition. Solomon was well formed to take an estimate of human life, and, after a wise and attentive survey, he thus records the result of his observations : “ All things are full of labour ; man cannot utter it : the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.—I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is

vanity and vexation of spirit*.” This is not the conclusion of a speculative recluse, totally ignorant of life; or of a gloomy ascetic, who had no taste for pleasure, no sensibilities in his soul; or of an envious disappointed mind, which may induce a man to speak contemptuously of what he cannot possess; but it is the instruction derived from sound wisdom and large experience; it is the admonition of him, who, with great refinement of sentiment, had strong passions; who could command every gratification, and actually “withheld not his heart from any joy†,” determining to make a full trial whether the world could render him truly happy. A thousand experiments were made, but they all failed, and at last, with bitterness and anguish, he felt and owned his folly, warning others that they never could succeed better than himself, and that every scheme for attaining earthly bliss must end in disappointment and misery.

But let us extend our inquiries, and search throughout the world; where is content? Ask from door to door, Have you what you wish? Are not your sweetest draughts imbittered by some ingredient in your cup? What mean those loud complaints which we hear? What a general spirit of dissatisfaction do we perceive! Thousands, and tens of thousands, are weary of life in its gayest

* Eccles. i. 8, 14.

† Eccles. ii. 10.

forms, and say in their hearts, "I loath it; I would not live alway." Not a few, as we know, hasten to close the wretched scene with violence upon themselves, and "choose strangling and death rather than life*."

II. Man is continually liable to many external calamities and bodily afflictions. He is condemned to labour for his daily support, and "in the sweat of his face to eat bread, till he return unto the ground†." Millions are consigned to a hard and cruel bondage, to occupations the meanest and most disgusting, to the injury of health, and in constant peril of death. What is life to those who dig in the mine, or toil at the oar, who spend all their days in servile or rigorous drudgery!

If we are placed in the most favoured situation, and enjoy ease and competence, yet our bodily frame is weak, and it is not probable that the vigour of health will remain with us for many years. We are exposed to a thousand painful and dangerous attacks, which we cannot evade or resist, and to innumerable accidents, which in a moment may destroy or imbitter all our comforts. How many languish out a tedious life in pining sickness; or, racked with acutest tortures, complain that they are "full of tossings to and fro, —that they are made to possess months of vanity,

* Job vii. 15, 16.

† Gen. iii. 19.

and that wearisome nights are appointed to them * !” How large is the catalogue of human diseases, which have received their commission to waste and to destroy ! The world itself is like an immense hospital, in which there are not many more persons in health, than suffice to administer to the accommodation of the numerous patients.

While wars, famines, pestilences, desolate whole nations, what do we meet with in private life, amidst all the civilities and comforts of polished society, but a long train of evils, which are the source of much disquiet and unhappiness ? Injurious and oppressive treatment from enemies, unkindness and treachery among professed friends, our most sanguine expectations disappointed, our flattering prospects suddenly overcast, our plans of pleasure or advancement entirely broken, heavy losses sustained, domestic enjoyments embittered by broils and contentions, and dearest relations, “ the desire of the eyes,” snatched away at a stroke ! If our lives be prolonged, what do we see around us, what do we experience in our own case, but that “ man is of few days, and full of trouble † ?”

III. Man also suffers much unhappiness from the inward state of his mind. It is God’s righteous appointment, that evil tempers, passions,

* Job vii. 3, 4.

† Job xiv. 1.

and desires, should bring their own punishment with them. What violent tumults and painful agitations are excited in the breast by pride, anger, envy, jealousy, concupiscence, and revenge! And how many are thus rendered a terror and a torment to themselves! "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked*."

Even where there has been no irregularity of conduct, how often is tranquillity of mind destroyed, and life imbittered by cares and fears! How much distress is incurred by vain anxieties about futurity and forebodings of evil! And there are none, who have not occasion, and who are not at times compelled, to look back with keen remorse on their past transgressions. The power of conscience is great; and it is a fruitful source of human misery. Man, reproached and condemned by himself, is a very wretch indeed, not unfrequently trembling at his own shadow. By his most ingenious contrivances, he can scarcely silence this severe accuser, this rigorous judge. He endeavours to fly from himself; but he is still haunted by agonizing recollections of what he has been and done. Not Belshazzar alone, but many others have been disturbed and terrified, in the midst of their sensualities, so that "their

* Isa. lvii. 20, 21.

countenance has changed, and their thoughts have troubled them *.” Let the charge be brought home to every reader : Do you feel no uneasiness within ? Or will you not confess, however gay your appearance, and sprightly your conversation may be, that you have trembled in secret, and sometimes thought life a burden ? We add,

IV. Man, as a mortal creature, is unhappy. He must meet, and yet he dreads, the stroke of death. There can be no escape : there is “ no respect of persons,” no exception of any individual. All the generations before us have been swept away from the earth as with a flood : many are every moment dropping around us ; and, by our various pains and infirmities, we are warned of our own approaching dissolution. We ask not now, what is death ? but it is considered as an evil, from which man shrinks. Though wearied of life, he is unwilling and afraid to lay it down ; and it is at last wrested from him. This is God’s sentence, which must be executed. In some cases it may be delayed longer than in others ; but we are kept in a painful expectation of it, and must soon be called out, like condemned criminals, to suffer the stroke. “ It is appointed unto men once to die †.”

But why is this appointment ? It is evidently

* Dan. v. 6.

† Hebrews ix. 27.

the infliction of a righteous God: if we had not provoked his displeasure, he would not thus destroy the work of his own hands. And, when we see infants born in pain, suffering even from the womb, and frequently cut off by loathsome diseases, what shall we say, but that “we are shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin *?” This is perfectly unaccountable upon any other supposition; and it is the very explanation given by an inspired writer. “Death entered into the world by sin; and death has reigned even over them, who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression †,” that is, by actual offence, but whose very nature is corrupt, and who are involved in the consequences of their first parent’s guilt.

We ask those, who are disposed to debate the point, Do you boast of your native innocence? Is there no conviction of sin upon your minds? Why then are you terrified at death? Or why do you dread futurity? We allow, indeed, that your anxieties and fears are just and reasonable, if you consider what you are, and with what a God you have to do. May they produce their proper influence upon you, and lead you without delay to seriousness, to penitence, and prayer!

Our principal reference has been to undeniable facts, which every where offer themselves to no-

* Psalm li. 5.

† Rom. v. 12, 14.

tice. But such being the state of mankind, we may inquire, What account do the scriptures give of the matter? They confirm and explain the existence of misery in the world. They declare, that the Lord God is good, and that "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men *;" that our calamities proceed from him, on account of sin, and might have been much heavier. They teach us, therefore, to lie down in shame, and to confess, "O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, because we have sinned against thee:" "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed: Wherefore then doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities †." They warn us moroever, that, if no expiation be made, he will punish us in another life, where the misery will be inconceivably greater and everlasting. His menaces to this purpose are numerous and express, and all concur to establish the extremity and eternity of future torments, to which every transgressor is liable. In that tremendous state the dire effects of sin will be best understood: but could we for a moment draw aside the veil which hides the view, we should learn what that meaneth, "The wages of sin is death ‡."

* Lam. iii. 33.
Psalm ciii. 10.

† Dan. ix. 8. Lam. iii. 22, 39.
‡ Rom. vi. 23.

The description here given of human misery, arises not from a gloomy imagination, or from disgust with the world. We have only stated things as they really appear, and we are not at liberty to alter them. Why should we turn from the sight? Though painful, it may be salutary. It will teach us that we deserve to suffer; and therefore it may render us "patient in tribulation," and even thankful that we suffer no more. It may constrain us to pray, that the fierce anger of our God may be turned from us, and thankfully to embrace the gospel, which points out to sinners the way of life and peace. Let us bless God for Jesus Christ, who hath submitted to agonies more than we could bear, that he might redeem us from the curse! Through faith in his name, we shall possess that valuable ingredient, the infusion of which in the cup of human life will make the bitter waters sweet. While weighed down, then, with insupportable calamities, or harassed with inward terrors, let us hear his voice, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*."

* Matt. xi. 28.

ESSAY XX.

ON MAN'S STATE OF CONDEMNATION.

Man, as a depraved creature, is under condemnation. He is accused by his own conscience, and in his present sufferings marked by God's displeasure.—God's righteous character requires some token of his indignation.—His holy law declares every one accursed.—And the gospel is founded on man's liableness to punishment.—What this punishment is. Its real and proper eternity proved.

“THE whole world lieth in wickedness. There is none righteous, no, not one. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*.” Such is the infallible testimony concerning the present condition of man. But the charge is carried higher; and to trace our offences to their source, it must be remarked, that every individual comes into the world in a degenerate state, and inherits from his parents a principle of corruption and depravity. The consequence is, that we are all exposed to the divine displeasure, not only for

* 1 John v. 19. Rom. iii. 10, 28.

gross violations of duty, but for "the carnal mind," the very nature and disposition we possess from our birth. Such is the decision of St. Paul, who could not mistake the case, "We were BY NATURE the children of wrath, even as others*." No man can plead exemption from this charge; for it is obvious that all are included: and how solemn is the thought, that the whole race of Adam, through his original apostacy, have fallen under the wrath of Almighty God! Are we properly affected with a conviction of this sad truth?

In perfect unison with the Apostle, the Church of England has described our state; declaring that "Original sin is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore IN EVERY PERSON BORN INTO THIS WORLD IT DESERVETH GOD'S WRATH AND DAMNATION †."

The subject has already come before us in some measure: but we prosecute our inquiries still further, that they may produce in us the deeper humiliation, and excite us to pray the more earnestly, that the fierce anger of our God,

* Eph. ii. 3.

† Article ix.

though justly merited, may be turned away from us. Our position is, that man is as a criminal in the hands of justice, and that he is in fact treated as a guilty creature in a state of condemnation: The testimony of his conscience has been adduced; and it appears that in spite of all his endeavours to blind, and bribe, and silence it, this vicegerent of God within him retains power sufficient to arraign, convict, and sentence him. With all his self-flattery and obduracy, he is compelled to read his doom within his own breast: and is it to be supposed that the divine judgment will be more favourable to him than his own? "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things*." The whole plan of God's providence has also been appealed to, and its decision in the case is still more express. It speaks with a tremendous voice, and by all that numerous class of afflictions, which fall to the lot of human life, declares that we have provoked the displeasure, and therefore that we are justly suffering under the hand, of our great Creator. If man have not sinned, and the Lord God be not provoked, the misery, which pervades the world, is not to be accounted for. We proceed to other considerations in proof of the point.

I. God's righteous character requires some public testimony of his indignation against sin.

* 1 John iii. 20.

Is He the “ holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts,” before whom angels veil their faces, who is “ of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity * ?” And shall it be thought, that He is unconcerned about the conduct of his creatures ? What must be our ideas of his moral character and perfections, if we can suppose, for a moment, that we may despise his authority, and possess all vile affections without incurring his displeasure ? Is He such an one as ourselves, conniving at iniquity, or not regarding it with abhorrence ? This is too shameful and detestable a notion, however it may be secretly harboured, to be brought forward and defended. Considering then what we are, and what we have been and done, we conclude that creatures so polluted must be hateful in his sight. “ He is angry with the wicked every day.” “ His wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men †.” To this wrath, then, we are all exposed.

We are so, not merely for visible and gross violations of duty, but for our inward corruptions, of which He only can take cognizance, for our irregular desires, wrong principles, unholy tempers. Our very hearts, the fruitful source of abominations, are offensive to Him ; and there-

* Isa. vi. 2, 3. Habak. i. 13. † Psal. vii. 11. Rom. i. 18.

fore it is, that we are “BY NATURE the children of wrath.” He sees, and must see, with abhorrence, that “lust of the flesh,” that “carnal mind,” that “φρόνημα σαρκός,” which is “enmity against him.” This is “the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam,—which IN EVERY PERSON BORN INTO THIS WORLD deserveth God’s wrath and damnation *.”

II. The declarations of God’s holy law prove beyond a doubt, that we are in a condemned state. It will not be denied, that we are subject to his government, and that He hath laid before us a clear and express rule for the regulation of our conduct. The extent, the reasonableness, and excellency of this law, may come under future discussion; but some remarks may now be offered upon the question before us.

It requires from every soul of man an unvaried course of perfect and perpetual obedience. It allows not of any defect or departure in any situation or under any circumstances whatever. It commands also internal purity, no less than outward regularity, and forbids coveting, concupiscence, and hatred, as much as robbery, adultery, and murder. To the transgressor even of one precept it shews no mercy; for what is its language? “Cursed is every one that continueth

* Article ix.

not in all things, which are written in the book of the law to do them *.” Nay, were it possible to yield full and entire obedience to nine of the commandments, and violate only the tenth, yet certain condemnation would be incurred. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all †.” Nor is its sentence light. It dooms the sinner to final and everlasting misery. It declares him to be accursed of God; and that curse, if not removed, must issue in everlasting destruction. “For the wages of sin is death ‡;” DEATH in its most tremendous sense, an eternal separation from the presence of God and the felicities of his kingdom.

Who, then, can stand in the judgment according to this law? Who among the sons of Adam can say, “I have kept all its precepts, without a single instance of failure or disobedience: all my tempers and desires without intermission have been perfectly conformed to the will of God?” Behold, “every mouth is stopped, and all the world is become guilty before God §.” The law discovers our true state, and pronounces our doom. “For by the law is the knowledge of sin;—it worketh wrath;—the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death;—it is the ministration of death and condemnation ¶.” May we listen to its awful decla-

* Gal. iii. 10. † James ii. 10. ‡ Rom. vi. 23.

§ Rom. iii. 19. ¶ Rom. iii. 20, iv. 15, vii. 10, 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9.

rations, and receive from it the salutary, though painful, conviction of our guilt and obnoxiousness to severest punishment !

If any plead the goodness and mercy of God, as if he could not be much displeased with the creatures, upon whom he bestows so many favours ; we allow the exercise of these attributes in their full extent, but we deny the consequence. He spares, and proposes to save, the sinners, whom he might justly destroy for ever. But this grace is revealed only through Jesus Christ, and is granted for his sake. It therefore confirms our point ; and we add,

III. The whole plan of salvation, unfolded in the Gospel, is founded on the supposition that man is in a state of ruin and condemnation. “ The Son of man is come to seek and to save **THAT WHICH WAS LOST** *.” How strong the expression ! and how clear the inference, that mankind are lost for ever, unless rescued by his gracious interposition ! The work which he hath performed, evinces the sad condition to which we are reduced, and the sentence which hangs over our heads. He hath “ made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness†.” “ He hath made peace through the blood of his cross ;” and “ is the propitiation for our sins ‡.”

* Luke xix. 10. † Dan. ix. 24.

‡ Col. i. 20. 1 John ii. 2.

Through him alone it is, that the divine wrath is averted, and favour manifested to us. The benefits he bestows are such, as shew us to be utterly undone, and liable to perish for ever without him. Forgiveness, justification, and redemption; what do these imply, but that otherwise we must be chargeable with guilt, under the curse of the law, and as prisoners in the hands of justice?

Read the assurances of mercy given to real Christians, and while you perceive their high and blessed privileges, you collect at the same time the misery and ruin of their former state, and the certain future destruction of all other persons. “Whosoever believeth in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.—He is not condemned.—He hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,—and shall be saved from wrath through him. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*.” How great is their deliverance! But as many as have no part in this salvation, stand exposed to the fierce anger of Almighty God.

A full and deep conviction of this truth is implied in the very exercise of faith. However men at their ease, without any terrors of conscience,

* John iii. 16, 18.—v. 24.—Rom. v. 1, 9.—viii. 1.

may speculate about the Gospel, no one does actually apply for the benefits of redemption, who is not first persuaded in his heart, that he is a child of wrath and an heir of destruction. It is this view of his danger, which renders the Saviour acceptable and precious to him, and gives a forcible importunity to his cry, "Lord, save, I perish." Thus he "flees from the wrath to come:"—he "flees for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before him*." But without such a conviction, he will see no value or meaning in salvation; and to a thinking mind the whole apparatus must appear needless and absurd:

The nature and extent of that condemnation, to which we are naturally liable, exceed our comprehension. "Who knoweth the power of God's anger†?" Or who can calculate the misery which He may possibly inflict? But what we suffer in this life, may justly excite dreadful forebodings of the future. We are often made to feel excruciating pains of body, and agonizing tortures of the mind: Who can tell, whether in another state we may not be rendered capable of enduring unspeakably greater miseries? And what have we not to expect from Him, to whose indignation we are become obnoxious? We are in his hands, and He will proceed with us according to equity. But what the full desert of sin is, we

* Matt. iii. 7. Heb. vi. 18.

† Psalm xc. 11.

cannot pronounce. It is evil, immensely evil, beyond all our conceptions; and who shall presume to say, even if we had no revelation upon the subject, that its punishment will not, cannot, be eternal? Death, which is only a transition from one state to another, may not release us from the claims of justice: but it may be the grand crisis in our existence, and eventually prove "the beginning of sorrows." It is possible, that endless misery, though denounced and inflicted by a righteous God for the transgression of his law, may follow as a natural consequence of our lapsed and depraved condition *. If the soul be immortal, though it change its circumstances upon its separation from the body, it will remain eternally miserable from its own perverse and unholy affections, unless the previous and unmerited interposition of divine grace prevent it. Passing out of this world with wicked principles and dispositions, it must continue wretched for ever.

But we need not argue the point upon the conjectures and probabilities of reason: a fair appeal should be made to the sacred oracles. Let the Lord God speak, and give the decision. He himself is the only competent judge of the measure of punishment, which it may be just and necessary for Him to inflict. We are ignorant of what his

* Bp. Butler's Analogy.

attributes and government may require ; and we are too prejudiced to pass an honest sentence in our own cause. But He has told us expressly, that the future torments, which his justice has prepared, and to which we are all exposed by sin, are EVERLASTING. How many and unequivocal are the declarations to this purpose ! “ He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” He will say, “ Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels : —and these shall go away into everlasting punishment,” —“ into the fire that never shall be quenched :” and it is repeated three times together, as if to prevent all doubt and subterfuge, that “ their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” —They “ shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power *.”

Yet though the doctrine be thus decidedly established, bold and presumptuous men cavil with it, and stretch all their ingenuity to explain it away. But we remark, that if the language of scripture, which we have here quoted, is not to be understood as declaratory of a real and proper eternity of punishment, it would be impossible to convey such a meaning by any words whatever : expressions more clear and forcible cannot be devised. The objections and the debates upon

* Matt. iii. 12. xxv. 41, 46. Mark ix. 43—48. 2 Thes. i. 9.

this point argue a perverse and obdurate mind. Are you not afraid to make God a liar by denying the truth of his own word? Or who are you, that you should dare to determine, contrary to his assertions, what is, or is not, right for Him to do? O deprecate his wrath, rather than dispute about it! The day is fast approaching, when He will vindicate his own sentence, and “will be clear, when he judgeth*.” Then probably we shall see, better than we now can, that there are many important ends to be answered by such an awful display of his righteous indignation, as dooms the sinner to never-ending torment and despair.

But is there no release? No; we have not the faintest shadow of an intimation, that the punishment will ever be terminated. This life is always spoken of as the only time of trial; the day of grace: and all beyond it is fixed and unalterable. The future sufferings of them that perish can have no tendency in their own nature to reform or soften them; and no renovating grace will then be extended to them. Their character therefore remaining the same, no alleviation of their sentence is to be expected. They will continue to sin, “blaspheming the God of heaven because of their pains†,” and on that account the wrath which abideth on them will never be removed.

If such, then, be our desert, how great is the

* Psal. li. 4.

† Rev. xvi. 11.

patience, which continues to spare some of the most obdurate of the human race ! How amazing the mercy, which can pardon the most atrocious sinner ! Let the redeemed of the Lord exult with gratitude, love, and joy, when they perceive from what a depth of misery they are rescued. But how strange is the stupor of those, who can hear of damnation without dreading the sentence, or desiring deliverance ! who can stand upon the very mouth of the pit, and laugh, and dance, and sing ! The case demands our tenderest compassion, and our most strenuous exertions. You, that have any feeling, entreat them “ to escape for their lives, lest they be consumed.” Beseech them to hear the warning voice of Almighty God ; “ Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee * ? ” And especially lift up your prayer to Him, that he may yet put forth his hand in mercy, and “ pluck them as brands out of the fire † ! ”

* Ezek. xxii. 14.

† Zech. iii. 2.

ESSAY XXI.

ON MAN'S INABILITY TO RECOVER HIMSELF.

Man is declared to be helpless as well as guilty. He has no power to recover himself, as he cannot remove the sad effects of sin—with respect to God,—or to his fellow-creatures,—or to himself.—The salvation proposed in the gospel proves his inability;—and all, who are redeemed to God, acknowledge it.

THE doctrine of man's apostacy and ruin is written in every page of the scriptures, in plainest and most indelible characters. It is exhibited to our view by the sacred writers on almost every occasion, and for various purposes. It is insisted on in order to produce in us penitential sorrow, humiliation, vigilance, and prayer, and also to excite gratitude and love to our gracious Deliverer, who has interposed for our rescue, when our case seemed quite desperate. Thus we read, "Christ died for the UNGODLY; and while we were yet SINNERS, and when we were ENEMIES, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." But what renders the mercy more precious, it was extended to us, "when we were yet WITHOUT

STRENGTH *," without any resource in ourselves, any power or ability to effect our own recovery.

This latter part of the subject remains to be considered, that we may complete the description of man as a fallen creature. Enough has been said, to shew that his situation is truly deplorable, that he is ignorant, corrupt, sinful, miserable, and condemned; and now we are to prove, that he is as helpless as he is guilty. This indeed is a consequence, or rather it is the very essence, of his depravity. He lies under A MORAL INABILITY. This is not an incapacity which will excuse him, but it is the degeneracy and baseness of his mind; and it does not palliate, but in a great measure constitutes his guilt. It is his entire loss of righteousness, his rooted love of sin, his fixed purpose to do evil, the unbending obstinacy of his will, inclining him ever to criminal and vile pursuits: this is the inability which renders his case desperate, as to himself; for he has no real desire to amend it, if he could. It is this consideration, more than any other, which utterly excludes boasting, and lays our honour in the dust.

It may be useful to enlarge our meditations upon the subject, for it involves various matters of great moment in our religious system. In proof of the doctrine, then, that man is "without strength" to accomplish his own salvation, let it be remarked,

* Romans v. 6—10.

I. He cannot remove the dreadful effects of sin, or repair the mischief. For let us examine, How much is to be done? Shall we presume to undertake so great a work? Let us not over-rate our powers, or foolishly attempt what we cannot perform, lest our failure cover us with confusion. "The redemption of the soul is precious*:" it is of such a value, that we have no adequate price to offer. Consider, what is to be done,

1. With respect to God. This is the question of principal importance, and which first strikes the mind: What may be necessary, in order to obtain reconciliation with our offended Maker? Every sin is a direct attack upon him. His perfections are denied; his authority despised; his commands resisted; confusion introduced into his government. Thus he is dishonoured by his own creatures, and robbed of that glory, love, and service, which are his rightful due. Who shall restore to him what he has lost? Can any plan be proposed to effect it? Or will he tamely abandon his dominion, and the claims he has upon his rebellious creatures?

His justice demands the punishment of the sinner; or, if this can be remitted, it must be in such a way, that his own righteous character may be manifested, and the honour of his law repaired. Satisfaction must be made. Who shall

* Psalm xlix. 8.

undertake the task? A sentence of awful condemnation is gone forth against us: can we resist its execution, or deny its equity? Who shall attempt to procure its reversal, or even a mitigation of its severity? We should weigh the matter well before we dare to offer any proposal upon the subject, lest we increase our guilt by our presumption.

We can render no compensation, nor expiate one offence by any sacrifices we may bring. However general may have been the notion of propitiating Heaven by the blood of animals, it is not to be conceived that their death can answer the ends of divine justice, or possess any efficacy in procuring the remission of punishment, otherwise than as being the appointed representation of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*." This, probably, was the origin of sacrifices; by which it was intended that every worshipper should confess his guilt and liableness to suffer, and plead, for his pardon and acceptance, the grand oblation of the cross to be offered in due time.

We endure many temporal afflictions, which are marks of God's displeasure: but let it not be imagined, that these, however sharp and complicated, will satisfy his justice, or atone for our transgressions. The penalty of the law extends

* Rev. xiii. 8.

farther than to the present life : it dooms the sinner to the pains of eternal death ; and therefore its claims remain the same when this calamitous scene is closed. It would be equally absurd to suppose, that any voluntary severities we may practise on ourselves, such as pilgrimages, penances, and mortifications, can form an adequate or acceptable propitiation. Ignorance and superstition may invent many devices of this kind to quiet the fears of a disturbed conscience ; but the penitent, who understands the nature of God and his law, will derive no satisfaction from them ; for he will perceive, that they cannot reach his case.

The most plausible plea, which an offender can urge in his own behalf, is, that however he may have failed, he will do better in time to come. But is this a firm foundation to depend upon ? Or will you presume upon your own ability to render unto God, even from this moment, a perpetual and perfect obedience ? This is his demand, and every thing short of it will be a fresh transgression. One evil thought would plunge you again into the mire. O consider the work you undertake !—But, granting that you possess a power sufficient for the purpose, your future amendment, if it should never in any instance be defective, still leaves you obnoxious to justice. It will be no more than your bounden duty for the time. You must answer for the past : and

all your boasted righteousness, for the many years you may yet be spared in the world, can have no effect whatever as an atonement for the least offence. After all your exertions, then, it will still remain a question, “Who shall entreat for us?”

But if a man undertake to make compensation for his sins, he should be able to remove its consequences,

2. With respect to his fellow-creatures. It is a false plea, which many urge, that they have done no harm to any but themselves. What, if they have not taken away the life, the property, or the character of another? As far as they have violated or neglected duty, they have committed an injury, and the influence of their conversation and example has been extensively pernicious. The deadly poison is infectious: it may have spread its mischief beyond their knowledge or conception; and its devastations are not to be repaired. Have you not robbed your nearest relatives of their due, affording them no spiritual instruction, no attention whatever to their precious souls? Have you not vitiated and hardened the minds of many who have witnessed your misconduct, in your families, among your acquaintance, and throughout the circle of your neighbourhood? Now, go and discharge the duties of former years, as well as of the present day; go, and reform those whom you have corrupted;

and bring back to God and his service all those also, whom they in their turn have seduced.

This is no more than what is necessary, in order to make up for sin, as some ignorantly talk, or to justify yourselves on the ground of having compensated the injury. But this is impracticable. You have had power to deprave and to ruin those, whom you cannot recover and save. Many are removed to distant places, where your admonitions will never reach them: and some are taken away by death, perhaps lost for ever through your influence or temptations. What recompense can you propose in such a case? The lives of others may be spared, but their hearts are obdurate. Try what you can do, to counteract the evil you have produced. Entreat, remonstrate, warn: they will not listen to your friendly voice: they will despise and insult you. Being tutored by you, they are gone forth into the world to perform the same injurious part to others, which you have acted towards them: and they are spreading far and wide the infection they have received from you. It is not possible to calculate the mischief of which you may have been the occasion, much less to make any reparation or atonement. Let us weep with unfeigned sorrow for the innumerable evils of sin, and pray God to interpose for the cure, which we cannot effect.

Man is equally unable to remove the sad consequences of the fall,

3. With respect to himself. This, at the first view, may seem an easier work ; but it will not be found so in reality : for how much is necessary to recover the soul from that abyss of corruption into which it is sunk, and to raise it to a state of purity and holiness ! The heart is to be dispossessed of the tyrant, who has long held his palace and maintained dominion there. An entire change, a total renovation is to be effected, “ Old things must pass away, and all things become new.” In short the man must be “ a new creature,”—“ renewed in the spirit of his mind, in knowledge, in righteousness, and true holiness *.” This is as much beyond his own power, as creation, or resurrection. Who can create a world ? or who can restore life to the dead, but God only ? Therefore, “ We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works :” “ And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins †.”

What can give us a clearer idea of perfect inability, than a state of death ? Yet such, it seems, is our natural condition. Shall we, then, presume upon our competency to extricate ourselves, and to perform all duties, as if we had sustained no loss of spiritual life ? Consider again, what is to be done. Long and inveterate habits of sin

* 2 Cor. v. 17. Eph. iv. 23, 24. Col. iii. 10.

† Eph. ii. 1, 10.

are to be overcome: bad propensities, continually rising and striving for the mastery, are to be vigorously resisted, nay, totally eradicated: all holy principles and affections are to be implanted and maintained in the soul. Is this a work, for which man discovers either abilities or inclination? and for the accomplishment of which he possesses sufficient energies within himself, without any foreign influence? Is such the conclusion you would draw from the declarations of the sacred scriptures, from your observation of the state of the world, or from the experience you have had of your own spiritual strength?

Go, and submit to God, as a sinner ought, with "a broken and a contrite heart." You are unwilling to stoop so low, and arrogantly stand upon your own defence. "Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions." If you are at all induced to make the trial, your resolutions and efforts fail.—Believe in the Saviour provided. You dislike the humiliating scheme; or if you accede to it, you will soon experience the truth of our Lord's declaration, "No man can come unto me, except the Father draw him*."—But if you refuse submission to Christ, you must yourselves fulfil the law of God in every point. "This do, and thou shalt live." But are you competent for such an undertaking? Put forth all

* John vi. 44.

your energies: try again and again. Is there no defect in your obedience? Or have you not cause to deplore your repeated deviations, and confess with shame, “When I would do good, evil is present with me *?”

II. The salvation, proposed in the gospel, demonstrates man’s inability to recover himself. We say not, There is no hope; but there is none from ourselves. The Lord God has interposed for our help; but his very interposition shews, that our case would otherwise have been desperate. It is this consideration, which “commendeth his love towards us †,” and magnifies his free and sovereign grace. Every description of his mercy is such, as implies that we were in a state of ruin, and must have perished without it. Take an attentive view of the wondrous plan, and then say, whether the whole, or any part of it, be needless.

When the Saviour “took upon him to deliver man,” was there any other “to make up the hedge, or stand in the gap?” He declares, that “the Son of man came to seek and to save THAT WHICH WAS LOST ‡.” If any, therefore, disallow the character, or maintain that they are not in themselves lost and undone, they virtually reject his aid: they are not the sheep whom he came to recover. Contemplate him in his deepest

* Rom. vii. 21. † Rom. v. 8. ‡ Luke xix. 10.

humiliation and suffering, in the bitter agonies of Gethsemane, or in "the sharpness of death" upon the cross; and can you imagine, that all this was an unnecessary scheme, or to you, at least, perfectly superfluous? Was the obedience of his life such as you could render? Was the sacrifice of his blood not at all requisite, or no better than you could offer? These must be your conclusions, if you plead for your own strength or goodness: you "frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain*."

We should argue in like manner from the promised influence of the Holy Spirit. Why is this provided and bestowed? Is it not to perform that work, which no man can do for himself, and without which we must remain void of all spiritual understanding, "alienated from the life of God," "dead in trespasses and sins," and incapable of entering into the kingdom of heaven? Shall we foolishly and presumptuously reject his gracious assistance, and suppose that by some latent powers, some vigorous exertions yet to be put forth, we may enlighten, regenerate, and sanctify ourselves? O let us fear to provoke him by such contemptuous arrogance, as supersedes his office, and reflects upon him, as if his work were vain! We add only,

* Gal. ii. 21.

III. Those, who have been recovered to God and to holiness, have uniformly and universally acknowledged their own inability. It seems absurd and preposterous, that persons of a different description should give an opinion in the case. Yet the proud boast of human sufficiency usually proceeds from those, who give no proof of it in their lives and tempers, who have not obtained the mastery over their own corrupt affections. But let those speak, who are now happily emancipated, who are “made free from sin, and become servants to God*.” Ask them, “By what means was the wondrous change effected, or your faith, hope, love, and zeal produced?” They may possibly differ in other opinions, but in this they will be united, in ascribing to God all their holiness, strength, and consolation. With one mouth they cry, “Thou, Lord, hast wrought all our works in us. We know, that in us (that is, in our flesh) dwelleth no good thing. But our sufficiency is of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do. For all things are of him, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ†.”

Such is the unvarying language of scripture saints; and such are the humbling acknowledgments which the Church of England prescribes for all her members. For thus we are taught to

* Romans vi. 21. † Isaiah xxvi. 12. Rom. vii. 18.

2 Cor. iii. 5.—v. 18. Phil. ii. 13.

pray, "There is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, from whom all good things do come, grant that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same. Of thine only gift it cometh, that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service: We pray thee, that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works, through Jesus Christ our Lord*."—Thus does our liturgy accord with that "form of sound words" contained in our articles, which unequivocally declares, "The condition of man, after the fall of Adam, is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God: wherefore WE HAVE NO POWER to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will†."

When the great plan of mercy shall be completed, and all the redeemed shall come to Zion, there will be no discordant note throughout the church triumphant; but the universal song will be, "Salvation to our God, which sit-

* General Confession. Collects for the 5th Sunday after Easter, for the 13th and 17th Sundays after Trinity.

† Article x.

teth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb *!" O that there were such an agreement upon earth!

If you still retain a doubt upon the subject, we repeat the advice, Go, and make trial of your strength: only take a full view of the work, which is to be done, apply to it with earnestness, and persevere in your efforts. Or rather, convinced by former disappointments, cease from the vain attempt; relinquish your plans, which must end in confusion. This spirit of self-dependence will effectually prevent your subjection to Christ, and keep you back from comfort. Never will you consent to be indebted to him for your whole salvation, till you despair of help in yourselves, and are constrained to cry, "Lord, save us; we perish." But imagine not, that the impotence, here treated of, will form any excuse for you, if you will still continue in your sins. Say not, "WE CANNOT renounce them:" for the true case is, you are unwilling. And when we take into the account the gracious offers, which are brought to you by the gospel, and your perverse rejection;—for "help is laid upon One that is mighty†," and you despise it;—we hesitate not to conclude, that "you have no cloak for your sin‡," and that mercy itself will exceedingly aggravate your condemnation.

* Rev. vii. 10.

† Psalm lxxxix. 18.

‡ John xv. 22.

ESSAY XXII.

ON SALVATION BY GRACE ALONE.

A brighter prospect opens.—We are not left in despair.—Salvation is entirely of grace.—The plan originated with God,—and was carried into effect by himself alone,—sending his Son into the world, and admitting of his mediation by sacrifice.—He appoints the means of grace and the publication of the gospel, where and by whom he pleases.—The reception and enjoyment of this salvation depend upon his influence, which is so bestowed as to display the freeness of his grace.—The progress also and completion of the work, prove it to be of God.

THE view we have taken in the preceding essays of the present state of man as a fallen creature, may seem to many persons gloomy and terrific, and may possibly have excited various objections in the mind of the reader. Prejudice, however, may be removed on more mature deliberation, and doubt and disgust give place to conviction and belief of the truth. A more pleasing part of our theological system is now offered to consideration, and one which may tend to conciliate re-

gard : it is calculated to raise the mourning penitent from the dust, and to inspire hope and confidence, gratitude and joy.

Bad as our case is, we are not left in despair. Deliverance is possible : it is brought nigh ; and it proceeds from a quarter, where we had no claim or just expectation of help. The Lord God himself has contrived and accomplished salvation : He proposes it to our acceptance ; and there are thousands, whom he has actually put into the possession and enjoyment of the blessing. Such is their devout acknowledgment, “ **HE HATH SAVED US**, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began*.” Here the great plan of mercy is traced to its origin and source : and we are carried back in our meditations to the eternal counsels of the Almighty Father.

That “ we are saved **BY GRACE**,” is a fundamental doctrine of the gospel, and one of its grand peculiarities. It hath pleased God to rescue sinners from destruction, without any thing on their part, except their misery, to excite his regard ; of his own will, by a sovereign act of undeserved favour. This is what we mean by **GRACE**. It stands in opposition to our supposed

* 2 Tim. i. 9.

goodness, and excludes all merit and all boasting in the creature. “If by grace (says the bold and able champion of the doctrine) then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work *.” The blessing is bestowed FREELY; and it is sufficient to give this, which is the only scriptural, account of it, “Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.—He loved the world:—according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded towards us;—that we should be to the praise of his glory. Therefore his own arm brought salvation †.”

Who will controvert the doctrine? Let him make good his claim on the plea of his own merit. Vain, presumptuous man! The very attempt must turn to thy confusion. Rather, bow down and deprecate deserved vengeance, and exclaim in grateful and devout admiration, “What hath God wrought!” O what thanks, and praise, and love, and service, are due to him, who hath commanded light to break in upon us in the midst of that profound darkness, which must otherwise have overwhelmed us with horror!

That the salvation of man is to be ascribed to the grace of God alone, will appear from the following considerations,

* Rom. xi. 6.

† Matt. xi. 26. John iii. 16. Eph. i. 7, 8, 12. Isa. lxiii. 5.

I. The plan originated with God, and was the object of his counsels from eternity. Whatever fallen man might wish or hope, he was not in a capacity to make any overtures of satisfaction to his offended Creator: much less could it enter into his thoughts to propose the incarnation, obedience, sacrifice, and intercession of a divine person, in order to obtain reconciliation for sin; nor could he presume of himself to solicit forgiveness for the sake, or through the meritorious sufferings, of such a Mediator. The scheme was devised and propounded by the Lord God himself: it could not proceed from any other. It was the effort of his wisdom, no less than of his goodness, to preserve the honour of his government, as well as to recover man.

Nor was the design first struck out, merely when the Saviour appeared in human flesh, or even upon the original transgression in paradise. The fall was foreseen, and the remedy provided, before the earth was formed, or the present system of things commenced. On such a subject we may soon be involved in perplexity; for our minds are contracted, and cannot measure the proceedings of an infinite and eternal Being. But this we may understand, that his plans and counsels are not limited by time, as ours are, that he has always the same views and the same intentions; that what he does now, he purposed to do, and that his purposes are the same from ever-

lasting. Are not these, at least, the conclusions we must draw from the following declarations? "He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world;—according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself:"—"according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began:"—"in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began:"—for "Christ, the Lamb without blemish and without spot, was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times*." This consideration most effectually excludes all human merit. For what could our obedience avail, before we were called into existence? Or what could we contribute even to the formation of the scheme, which was established in the counsels of Jehovah before the commencement of time, which was agreed on and fixed in "the everlasting covenant?" We can draw no other inference, than that "we are saved by grace."

II. The plan was carried into effect by the Lord alone. Full trial was given to the world for four thousand years, from which it might appear the more evident, that the divine interposition was indispensably requisite. During all that space nothing was done or even proposed on

* Eph. i. 4. 2 Tim. i. 9. Titus i. 2. 1 Pet. i. 20.

man's part, which could conciliate his Maker, or conduce to his own recovery: but just the contrary. He continued perverse and rebellious, in spite of the various efforts used to reclaim and subdue him to submission. Intimations of mercy through a propitiatory sacrifice were given, but they met not with general acceptance or approbation.

At length the Saviour came: and his coming is to be ascribed to his own gracious dispositions towards us, as well as to the love of the Father. Nor was he at all assisted in his work by those, whose cause he undertook. They did not welcome his appearance, or promote his designs. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."—"He was despised and rejected of men."—"He trod the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with him *." He went through his arduous office, against the most malignant opposition: for every thing, which human ingenuity or wickedness, aided by the malice of Satan, could devise, was actually done to prevent and frustrate his intentions. Had it, therefore, depended upon man, the whole must have failed, and redemption would have ceased for ever. We need not blame the Jews or the heathens for their hatred and united resistance of Christ. We should have manifested, the same

* John i. 11. Isa. liii. 3. lxiii. 3.

spirit, if we had been placed in the same circumstances. And shall we claim a share in the Saviour's merit, as if we had borne a part in his obedience or atonement? How presumptuous the thought! Let us rather adore the free and sovereign mercy of our God, who fulfilled his own purposes, contrary to the wishes and most vigorous efforts of his rebellious creatures, who would otherwise have perished in their sins. Let all the praise be given to him, while we bow our heads in the dust. "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord."—"Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation of our sins."—And "ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."—"He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood *."

III. As it was an act of grace in the Father to send his only-begotten Son into the world, it was equally so to admit of his mediation and accept the sacrifice. Justice might have asserted its claim in all its strictness; and then no oblation or intercession whatever could have availed to prevent our final destruction. It is mercy, rich and abundant mercy, which allows of any plea on behalf of sinners, and receives them to favour,

* Psalm iii. 8. 1 John iv. 10. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Rev. i. 5.

though it be through the expiatory sufferings and meritorious obedience of another. We could not demand the substitution of “him, who knew no sin, to be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him * :” nor can we ask the benefit of this appointment, as a matter of right, which cannot be denied. We owe it to the Father’s love, that the sacrifice of the cross should be “a propitiation for our sins :” we are “justified **FREELY BY HIS GRACE**, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ †.”

The blessing, we know, is secured to us by covenant, in which Jehovah hath bound himself by the strongest engagements; and on that ground we may approach him with confidence, and even claim what he hath promised to bestow. But it should never be forgotten, that this is a covenant of grace, and every promise perfectly gratuitous. Justice, indeed, is displayed in the sufferings of our Redeemer; but its full rights are waved, not asserted, with respect to every sinner that believeth in him, and pleads his blood in arrest of judgment. May we feel, as we ought, a deep sense of our obligations, and give thanks for such amazing mercy, which hath “consecrated for us this new and living way, and given us boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus ‡.”

IV. The publication of the gospel, containing

* 2 Cor. v. 21.

† Rom. iii. 24.

‡ Heb. x. 19, 20.

the offer of salvation, is so ordered, as to shew that it is altogether a matter of grace, not a debt, to those who are favoured with it. Very mysterious are the dispensations of God's providence, even those on which the eternal state of millions is suspended ; but they are such as demonstrate his sovereignty. The glad tidings of " the acceptable year of the Lord " are not universally announced : he sends his word where and by whom he pleases. None have any right to it, and therefore those, to whom it is carried, should adore his peculiar condescension and mercy to them. He causeth the light to shine upon them : it is " the day of their visitation : " " the kingdom of God is come unto them."

Examine only, how the blessing is bestowed ; and it will appear that it is owing, not to themselves, but entirely to God. They did not, and, in the first instance, they would not, solicit for the ministry of the gospel. In general men are averse to it, and oppose its admission amongst them : they are disturbed even by the messengers of peace, and entreat them, as some did their divine Master, " to depart out of their coasts *." But if they be willing, or ever so desirous, to receive them, they cannot open the door. We know " who hath the key of David, who openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man

* Matt. viii. 34.

openeth*.” That in any case he is pleased to remove obstructions, and to prepare the way for his ministers, to establish a church, and to institute the means of grace, should be allowed to be a merciful interposition, a special favour of his providence.

To him also we are indebted for raising up suitable instruments, and endowing them with needful qualifications, for the important work of persuading sinners “to be reconciled to God.” It is only when “he gives the word, that great is the company of those that publish it †.” The most eminent of them thus acknowledge, “We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament ‡.” And we are all admonished, when lamenting that “the labourers are few,” to “pray the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest §.”

If you ask, Why are not all places equally favoured with the means of grace? We answer nothing to a question so presumptuous. “He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,” and he has a right “to do what he will with his own ||.” O praise him for your peculiar privileges, and implore that grace, which

* Rev. iii. 7. † Psalm lxviii. 11. ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 5, 6.

§ Matt. ix. 37, 38. || Eph. i. 11. Matt. xx. 15.

may enable you to improve them, lest he be provoked to withdraw the light, and “darkness come upon you !”

These observations are general, and suited to the state of mankind at large. But we must be more particular in our application of the subject, and observe that the scheme of salvation, which originates in the sovereign mercy of God, can only be rendered effectual by the same mercy, wherever it does avail. This indeed appears a necessary inference from the principles already established. If any individual of the human race, without assistance from above, ever did or could procure to himself a participation of the blessings proposed in the gospel, there would be to that individual a ground of boasting above others, contrary to the determination of the Lord God Almighty, “That no flesh shall glory in his presence *.” We remark, therefore,

V. The reception and enjoyment of salvation depend upon a divine influence, which is also administered in such a way, as to abase our pride, and secure the honour to the grace of God alone. All are disposed by their natural depravity to reject the offers of redemption by Christ, so humbling and so holy. Where objections are overcome, and there is an unfeigned readiness to yield compliance ; this is the effect of a change

* 1 Cor. i. 29.

produced upon the mind by him that formed it, and not of mere human exertions. “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy *.”

Such is the description given of the experience of all those, who are reconciled to God by Jesus Christ. He “enlightens the eyes of their understanding, that they may know what is the hope of his calling,” and “shines in their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ †.” They are given to Christ as the sheep of his fold; and, by the faith which is of God’s operation, they come unto him that they may be justified ‡. “God hath from the beginning chosen them to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto he calls them by the gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ §.” “He hath called them unto the fellowship of his Son,” and “created them in Christ Jesus unto good works, which he hath before ordained that they should walk in them ¶.” “The love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto them;” and “nothing shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus their Lord ¶¶.”

* Rom. ix. 16. † Eph. i. 18. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

‡ John vi. 37. x. 16. Col. ii. 12. § 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

¶ 1 Cor. i. 9. Eph. ii. 10. ¶¶ Rom. v. 5. viii. 39.

“ Happy art thou, O Israel ! Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord * ? ” Stand, and admire the great deliverance wrought for you. What was it that induced you to accept the mercy proposed ? Many others, to whom the same offer was made, pertinaciously refused it. Were you better than they ? Did you not participate of the same corrupt nature, and the same moral inability ? To say, that you chose to return to God, in compliance with his invitations, is to say nothing : the only consistent and scriptural account of the matter is, that he inclined your wills to make the choice. Therefore it was, that the “ gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost † . ” For while others object, and cavil, and scornfully refuse, “ his people shall be willing in the day of his power ‡ . ” Let his name be glorified for such abundant, unmerited, and distinguishing grace !

The previous characters also of those, “ who are redeemed from among men,” are often of such a sort, that they display the freeness and efficacy of divine grace in their conversion. “ The Lord seeth not as man seeth § . ” He distributes his gifts and calling, not according to human estimation, or our rules of proceeding : and he as-

* Deut. xxxiii. 29. † 1 Thess. i. 5.

‡ Psalm cx. 3. § 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

signs no other reason for his conduct than this, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy *." "To the poor the gospel is preached," and to such as are illiterate, or mean and contemptible in society, it is generally most acceptable, while their superiors in rank, in abilities, and attainments, often turn away from it with profane contempt. Is not this a part of God's plan? "He hath hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hath revealed them unto babes."—"Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom?"—"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:—that no flesh should glory in his presence †."

Still more mysterious is the discrimination of characters in a moral point of view. Many, who were once profligate and abandoned, are turned to God in righteousness, and obtain mercy. Al-

* Rom. ix. 15.

† Matt. xi. 25. James ii. 5. 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

mighty power is displayed in the conversion of the most obdurate, and infinite grace in pardoning and effacing all their sins, even those of crimson die. What shall we say, when we see the most atrocious offenders become eminently devout, and assured of their acceptance and salvation through the blood of the cross, while many of regular and decent conduct will not “submit themselves to the righteousness of God?” Shall we murmur at the favourable reception they meet with from the Saviour, and petulantly object, like the Pharisees of old, “This man receiveth sinners *?” Or, like the elder brother, be out of temper, because the prodigal is admitted into our Father’s family †?” Rather, let us admire the dispensation, which so effectually abases the pride of man, and magnifies divine grace. Such characters being selected, as the idolater Manasseh, the adulterous woman of Samaria, the extortioner Zaccheus, the dying thief upon the cross, the blaspheming Saul, and the murderers of Christ, what can we conclude, but that the Lord delighteth to shew mercy, where we should abandon all expectation; —that “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound;”—and that “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts ‡?” We add only

* Luke xv. 2. † 25—32. ‡ Rom. v. 20. Isa. lv. 9.

VI. The progress and completion of the work prove it to be of God. The whole support and continuance of the Church depend entirely upon him. Our hearts may sometimes tremble for the ark of God; but he has said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it*." It has been upheld in spite of the most violent assaults: and it owes its protection to an almighty arm. Jehovah declares, that he watches over it with unceasing care, as his beloved possession: "I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day†."

What is said of the security of the whole church, may also be asserted concerning its individual members. For if one of these may finally perish, another also may: thus all might be lost, and the scheme entirely fail; which is an impossible supposition. Believers are in themselves feeble and perverse: they would be easily overcome by their formidable assailants, and, left to their own foolish and wayward inclinations, they would "draw back," and plunge themselves into sin and perdition. Nothing prevents it, but the power, the faithfulness, the immutability, and the love of their God and Saviour. He engages to preserve them from apostacy, to carry on the mysterious process of their sanctification, and "to present them faultless before the presence of his

* Matt. xvi. 18.

† Isaiah xxvii. 3.

glory *.” “ We are confident of this very thing, that he, which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ :” for “ you are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation †.” Thus, in the consummation of all things, “ he shall bring forth the head-stone” of the spiritual edifice, “ with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it ‡ !”

What other account of this amazing plan can possibly be given, than that of the apostle ? “ Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called : and whom he called, them he also justified : and whom he justified, them he also glorified §.” And how exactly does our church express her agreement with the doctrine, while she describes the character and privileges of “ the called of God according to his purpose !” “ They through grace obey the calling : they be justified freely : they be made sons of God by adoption : they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ : they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God’s mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity ||.”

O “ give diligence to make your calling and

* Jude 24.

† Phil. i. 6. 1 Pet. i. 5.

‡ Zech. iv. 7.

§ Rom. viii. 29, 30.

|| Article xvii.

election sure," and then it will be matter of unspeakable consolation to you, that salvation is entirely of grace. If you have not yet attained to the strong confidence which some possess, your penitential sorrow, your ardent supplications, and your earnest desires to be united to the Saviour, are favourable tokens, and may suggest encouragement. The Lord, who is drawing you by his Spirit, will surely receive you; and "his grace will be sufficient for you." He has made provision for your recovery in a way honourable to himself, and, according to his own appointed method, he can pardon all your offences, deliver you from the dominion of sin, sanctify you wholly, and conduct you to his heavenly kingdom. O be persuaded to accept the tendered mercy, and then you will say, with transports of admiration and joy, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift *!"

But let not careless sinners presume upon their safety, from the principles here advanced. This doctrine can be no source of comfort to you, who wish to retain your iniquities; because the salvation it proposes is such as in your present state you cannot relish or partake of. You continue to despise and reject "the dispensation of the grace of God," which has announced to our fallen world "good tidings of great joy:" and it is

* 2 Cor. ix. 15.

this consideration, more than any other, which renders you odious and inexcusable in the sight of God. Instead of answering your captious objections, or entering into any perplexed debates upon the subject, we entreat your serious attention to that solemn question, “How shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation *?”

* Heb. ii. 3.

ESSAY XXIII.

ON THE GODHEAD OF THE SAVIOUR.

Different opinions maintained concerning the person of our Redeemer. His real Godhead proved from I. most unquestionable witnesses,—ancient prophets,—Jesus Christ himself,—Apostles,—holy angels,—the catholic Church. II. His names and attributes. III. His works and offices. IV. The high regard due to him.—The doctrine mysterious but important.

A DEPLORABLE account has been given of the present condition of our species ; but our hopes have been encouraged by the declarations of divine mercy. The Lord God, of his own abundant grace, has proposed, and brought into effect, a glorious plan of salvation. This we are proceeding to consider : and in order that we may obtain a clear view of the method of our recovery, it is in the first place necessary that we form right and consistent notions of the person of our Redeemer. How else shall we regard him as we ought ?

It is generally acknowledged that there was once such an inhabitant as Jesus Christ in the land of Judea, of most extraordinary character :

the existence of the Christian name and the propagation of the Gospel prove it. He is the author of our religion, the founder of our faith. Now admitting the scripture history, (and what other just account of him has ever been or can be given?) we must believe him to be the only foundation of a sinner's hope, "the way, the truth, and the life," without whom "no man cometh unto the Father," and that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*." What He hath done and suffered, and what offices he sustained in order "to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness," must be a subsequent consideration. At present we inquire, What was his origin? What his real dignity?

None need to be informed, that there are different opinions in the Christian world concerning this important point. Some contend, that he was no more than a wise and holy man, who endured much contempt and persecution, and at last died for his steadfast adherence to truth and virtue; that he had no prior existence before his appearance on the earth, and that he possessed no other nature than the human. Others admit that he was superior to man, but assert that though no more than a very excellent and glorious

* 1 Cor. iii. 11. John xiv. 6. Acts iv. 12.

creature, he is now, as a recompense for his work, exalted to such a state of dignity, that he may in a lower sense be called God.

We believe that both these sorts come far short of the truth, that both are dangerously mistaken, that they rob the Saviour of his glory, and that they cannot with such views maintain the proper and necessary dispositions of mind towards him. Our appeal must be "to the law and to the testimony:" for in this case the Bible is the sole arbiter; and its sentence should be allowed to be authoritative and decisive. From its declarations, which we consider as most explicit, we conclude, that He, who was the despised Nazarene and appeared in human form, not only had a previous existence, but that he was from everlasting possessed of all perfections which are appropriate to Divinity, and that He is equally with the Father and the Holy Spirit very and eternally God. Let the sacred scriptures be interpreted according to the natural and obvious meaning of the words, without force or the subtle refinements of criticism, and this we are persuaded is the inference, which every honest inquirer unversed in debate would draw from them. The conciseness of an essay will not permit us to quote every passage which might be brought in support of the doctrine, but it will be necessary to confirm it by some strong texts; and we would remark

moreover, that it is implied in the whole system of the gospel, that it enters into the practice as well as theory of our religion, and is not to be renounced without giving up the principles and dispositions, which are peculiar to true Christians and essential to their salvation.

I. We produce the most unquestionable witnesses in favour of our position, and entreat a serious attention to their testimony : indeed their character demands it.

Let the ancient Prophets speak ; for unto them it was revealed what manner of person it was, who should redeem the world.—We read of various manifestations of his glory in the writings of Moses. From a comparison of these writings with the new testament, there can be no doubt that it was the Saviour, who appeared to the patriarchs and to Moses in human form, thereby probably intending to intimate his future incarnation, and at the same time displaying his high dignity as their Lord and their God. Unto the Jewish lawgiver especially He was made known by the mysterious and incommunicable name of—I AM ; and full proofs of the overwhelming radiance and sovereign authority of his divine majesty were exhibited on mount Sinai*.

David, “ the sweet singer of Israel,” spake much concerning him, and asserted his deity in

* Exod. iii. xxxiii. xxxiv. &c.

language which cannot easily be mistaken. What other conclusion can we draw from these sublime descriptions of him? “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre *.” “All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.—Daily shall he be praised. And blessed be his glorious name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory †.” “The Lord said unto MY LORD, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool ‡.”

By the prophet Isaiah the Spirit spake expressly, and the testimony is irrefragable. “A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name IMMANUEL;” which being interpreted is “GOD WITH US,” or God in our nature §. “And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, THE MIGHTY GOD, THE EVERLASTING FATHER ||.” “For thy Maker is thine husband; THE LORD OF HOSTS is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall he be called ¶.” It is not necessary to add a comment; it is not possible for language to be more explicit.

We need not cite all the prophets, among whom there is a perfect union of sentiment;

* Psalm xlv. 6. Heb. i. 8. † Psalm lxxii. 11, 15, 19.

‡ Psalm cx. 1. Matt xxii. 44. § Isa. vii. 14. Matt. i. 23.

|| Isaiah ix. 6.

¶ Isaiah liv. 5.

but we cannot overlook the declaration of Micah, that the Saviour is He, "whose goings forth have been from of old," not merely as a pre-existent creature, but as very God, "FROM EVERLASTING *." Nor should we forget that by Zechariah thus saith the Lord of hosts, when asserting the claims of his justice, concerning Him who should stand in the place of sinners, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is MY FELLOW †." What can we conclude, but that the Son is equal with the Father?

If Jesus Christ be allowed to be "the faithful and true witness," his testimony surely may be received in support of his own character. "Though he bear record of himself, yet his record is true, for he knew whence he came, and whither he should go ‡." Can we doubt, whether he claimed the honour of Divinity as his original right, when we hear him issuing out this gracious but authoritative proclamation, in ancient prophecy, with a view to his future advent? "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NONE ELSE. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue

* Micah v. 2. Matt. ii. 6. † Zech. xiii. 7. Matt. xxvi. 31.

‡ John viii. 14.

shall swear*.”—When he appeared on earth, he asserted his high dignity in terms equally full and intelligible. In the very face of his enemies he maintained, that He performed the same divine operations, which the Father himself did, and that “God was his Father,” in such a sense that they understood him to “make himself equal with God,” and he admitted their interpretation of his words†. At another time he excited the indignation of his captious hearers, by this astonishing declaration, “Verily, verily I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM‡.” This is a mode of speaking peculiar to Jehovah, descriptive of existence independent, unchangeable, and eternal. It would be a violation of grammar to understand it otherwise. The doctrine was offensive, and, had the people mistaken him, doubtless he would have corrected them; but he repeated it in language, if possible more clear and forcible, when he said, “I and my Father are one§.” He reproved the apostle Philip for ignorance of his character, after so long an intercourse with him, and then added, as if in full explanation, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father||.” When addressing himself immediately to his

* Isaiah xlv. 22, 23. Rom. xiv. 11. Phil. ii. 10.

† John v. 17, 18.

‡ John viii. 58. Exod. iii. 14.

§ John x. 30.

|| John xiv. 9.

Father, he pleaded his own eternal and essential union with him, and said, “Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world*.”—He ascended up where he was before, and from heaven he manifested his glory, particularly to his beloved apostle: and on his infallible evidence it is recorded for the instruction of the church in all future ages, that Jesus Christ is “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, THE ALMIGHTY;” and that it is He, “which searcheth the reins and hearts†.” Is it possible to describe the perfections of Deity in more explicit language?

From our Lord’s testimony we proceed to that of his apostles, who are all unexceptionable witnesses. St. John especially, anxious to maintain the honour of his Master, is thought to have written his gospel on purpose to establish the doctrine. His sublime introduction must stand as an irrefragable proof of it; for after reading there, that “the Word, which was made flesh, was in the beginning with God and was God,” that “all things were made by Him,” and that “in him was life‡,” shall any subtleties of criticism persuade us, that he himself was a crea-

* John xvii. 24. † Rev. i. 8. Isa. xlv. 6. xlviii. 12. Rev. ii. 23. 1 Kings viii. 39. Jer. xvii. 10. ‡ John i. 1—4, 14.

ture, who once had no existence? St. John admonished his Christian brethren to beware of idolatry; but it is idolatry to give divine honours to Christ if he be not GOD in the proper and full sense of the word; and yet the apostle, whilst delivering the caution, declares with peculiar emphasis, "This is THE TRUE GOD and eternal life*." Shall we hear St. Thomas addressing him, "My Lord, and my God†," and doubt his sentiments? He spake not, as some would have it, merely to express his surprise, for then it would be an irreverent and impious exclamation: but his unbelief being removed, he was constrained in this solemn manner to acknowledge and adore the Saviour. St. Peter asserts, "He is Lord of all;" St. James styles him "the Lord of glory;" and St. Jude, "the only wise God," to whom belong "glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever‡." St. Stephen is not unworthy to be introduced among the apostles: and when he was full of the Holy Ghost, favoured with an immediate view of Christ in his glory, he worshipped him, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit§!" What a chain of evidence is here!

St. Paul was "not behind the very chiefest of the apostles," in the knowledge of his Lord, or

* 1 John v. 20.

† John xx. 28.

‡ Acts x. 36. James ii. 1. Jude 25. § Acts vii. 59.

in zeal for his name: and his writings furnish incontrovertible evidence of the doctrine. To the Romans he says, that “ Christ is over all, God blessed for ever * :” to the Corinthians, that he is “ the Lord from heaven † :” to the Philippians, that “ being in the form of God, He thought it no robbery to be equal with God ‡ :” and to the Colossians, that “ all things were created by Him and for Him ; that He is before all things, and that by Him all things consist ;” and that “ in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily § .” Is there the least shadow of ambiguity in these descriptions ? Or can they leave the mind of the serious reader in any uncertainty ?

That we may not protract the apostle’s testimony beyond a due length, let us further attend only to his most unequivocal declaration to his beloved Timothy : “ Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness ; God was manifested in the flesh || .” From this one text we must be constrained to allow the doctrine, or else put the utmost violence upon language, and adopt the most unnatural and absurd interpretations. When we hear, that the plan of salvation confessedly involves in it “ a great mystery,” we must be prepared to expect a system which human reason

* Rom. ix. 5. † 1 Cor. xv. 47. ‡ Phil. ii. 6.

§ Col. i. 16, 17. ii. 9. || 1 Tim. iii. 16.

could not have discovered, and which is still attended with great difficulties. We observe, too, that the most prominent part of the system, and that to which our regard is first and chiefly directed, is the manifestation of the Redeemer in the flesh. But how is all this to be reconciled with their supposition, who consider Him only as a creature, denying his Deity because it is a mystery, and with a view to get rid of all mysteries in religion? Is it competent to any creature to assume of its own accord the nature of another creature? Or where is the mighty wonder, that a certain person once appeared in human form, when he could not appear any otherwise? But all is consistent, whilst yet we are filled with admiration, and reason stands aghast, when we are assured, that **GOD WAS MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH.**

Could we ascend from earth to heaven, what a numerous host of witnesses should we there obtain! All the holy angels, not excepting the highest, “whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers,” are not only subject to Jesus Christ, and as his ministers ready to execute his will, but they owe to Him their eminence, their most exalted faculties, and their very existence. Nay, he formed them for his own service and glory *. And would any of these hesitate to

* Col. i. 16.

acknowledge his Divinity? When his incarnation was announced, they were commanded to worship him even in that low estate*; and now they cast their crowns before him, and cry aloud with exultation, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him—for ever and ever†!” Is it possible to express any adoration superior to this?

The evidence for this doctrine, we allow, rests entirely on Revelation; and yet it may not be improper to appeal to the testimony of the holy catholic church in support of our interpretation. Though much pains have been taken to represent it as “a corruption of Christianity,” it has been proved incontrovertibly, that this is the sense in which the primitive Christians and successors of the apostles understood the sacred writings; that the contrary opinion from the beginning, wherever it was broached, was condemned as heretical; that divine honours have been uniformly ascribed to Christ by the churches of all the different parts of Christendom; and that where there has appeared most of the genuine spirit, the life, and power of religion, the doctrine in question has always been maintained with the greatest zeal, as “the pillar and ground of the truth.”

It might be invidious to appeal to living characters, but general observation will warrant the

* Heb. i. 6.

† Rev. iv. 10. v. 11—13.

assertion, that those, who seem most humble, self-denying, and ardently devout, who are most sensible of their need of the Saviour, of the value and efficacy of his mediation, and of their obligations to Him, who have imbibed most of his temper, and are most active to promote his cause, —are almost unanimous in worshipping Him as their Lord and their God. It is granted, that many irreligious persons are orthodox by profession, and some of them may contend warmly for their system; they take up with the national creed, whatever it may be, and they find it convenient to support it. These men would not be amended, merely by changing their notions. But we have known many sad instances of persons, who, while on the side of orthodoxy, appeared exemplary, devout, and eminently religious, and, being seduced from the faith, condemned their former strictness as unnecessary and absurd, and pleaded for one sensual indulgence after another, till, by a rapid and dreadful progress, they plunged into all iniquity with greediness. Agreeably to this observation, it is undeniable that the generality of those, who oppose the doctrine of our Lord's Godhead, entertain very low conceptions of the spirituality, the extent, and awful sanctions of the divine law: with them, therefore, the justice of God requires no propitiation, and there is great danger of carrying our notions of evangelical holiness much too far. How

different is this from the whole tenour of the scriptures*!

II. We appeal to the names and attributes of the Saviour, in proof of his Deity. This, indeed, has been in some measure anticipated; for in the foregoing testimonies we have seen many of the appropriate titles and perfections of the supreme God applied to him. It may be remarked, however, still further, not only that he is called GOD in innumerable passages, but that he is revealed to us by the appellation of JEHOVAH, which is most descriptive of the self-existence of Divinity, incommunicable therefore to a creature. Thus he is styled “THE LORD (or JEHOVAH) our righteousness †.” He is “the Prince of the kings of the earth”—“King of kings, and Lord of lords ‡;” inasmuch as all power is derived from Him, and He disposeth of the mightiest empires, and of those that govern them, according to his own sovereign pleasure. He is the “most mighty,”—“the Lord of hosts,”—“the God of the whole earth §.” “He knows what is in man,” by virtue of that peculiar prerogative of Deity, a perfect and infallible discernment of the thoughts and intents of the heart ||. Omnipot-

* See an admirable treatise, entitled, *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems examined and compared, as to their moral tendency*, by Mr. Andrew Fuller. 1793.

† Jer. xxiii. 6. ‡ Rev. i. 5. xix. 16.

§ Psalm xlv. 5. Isaiah liv. 5. || John ii. 25.

tence and omnipresence, the appropriate attributes of the Godhead, belong to Him. For what else is to be concluded from that gracious declaration to his disciples, when he was departing from them into heaven, “Lo ! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world * ?” It is the language of Jehovah, I AM, and contains an express engagement to be present with his church at all times, and in all the different parts of the earth. But this itself would be vain and nugatory, if he did not possess the absolute and uncontrollable power of yielding us sure protection, and supplying all our necessities. We conclude then, “our Redeemer is strong,”—“mighty to save †.”

III. We maintain, that his divine nature may be inferred from his works and offices. It might, perhaps, be argued from an attentive view of the case, that no created being could be sufficient to sustain the character of our Mediator, and to effect whatever may be requisite for our recovery. But waving the argument *a priori*, we remark that the history of Jesus Christ incontestably proves the point.

He spake and acted as no creature could. Not only the miracles which he wrought, but the manner of his performing them, evinced his high dignity. By his touch, and by his word even at a distance, inveterate and incurable diseases were

* Matt. xxviii. 20.

† Jer. l. 34. Isaiah lxiii. 1.

instantly removed. The winds and the seas obeyed him, as if they acknowledged the presence of their Lord. The objections of his malignant enemies, for the claims which he set up, would have been well grounded, and even the sentence of condemnation, which they passed upon him, would have been just, if He were not **GOD MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH**. For if, like them, we consider him as a mere man, we must be disposed to cry out, “He hath spoken blasphemy *.”

It has been remarked, that He is the Creator of all; and we conceive the inference to be undeniable, that He himself is not created. We conclude, then, with the apostle, “He that built all things is God †.” But we have seen also, that He is the final end of creation, and that he thereby intended to display his own glory ‡. Can any thing more dignified than this be ascribed to the Father?

The Son of God upholds and governs all things §. He appoints and regulates the complicated affairs of universal government. The various classes of creatures are kept in their order, are sustained, and even preserved in existence by his continual agency. But is any wisdom or power,

* Matt. ix. 3. John x. 33. Matt. xxvi. 65.

† Heb. iii. 4. ‡ Col. i. 16. Rev. iv. 11.

§ Col. i. 17. Eph. i. 22, 23.

less than divine, competent to such an office and such operations ?

Jesus Christ undertook to forgive sins, and wrought a miracle to prove his ability and right to do it*. The question of his accusers was not improper, "Who can forgive sins, but God only?" They should have concluded, however, when he had evinced the justice of his claim, "He is the Saviour,—the Lord from heaven."

He raiseth the dead; and He does it by his own sovereign authority: "The Son quickeneth whom He will." He could say, "Lazarus, come forth;" He brought again his own body from the grave; and not only at his command, but by his omnipotence, will be accomplished the general resurrection at the last day†. And is it conceivable that any mere creature can be invested with such powers as these?

Jesus Christ will also judge the world, and by a decisive, infallible sentence, will appoint to each individual of the human race his proper and everlasting portion. But what finite being can execute such an office? It is therefore assigned to our Redeemer for this express purpose, that his just claims may be vindicated, and his Divinity universally acknowledged; "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the

* Mark ii. 5—12.

† John ii. 19. v. 21, 28, 29. xi. 25, 43. 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22.

Father*.” That indeed will be the day of his triumph, the full manifestation of his glory; called therefore “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ†.” Who will doubt that He possesses the perfections of Deity, when they shall see him on the throne, “judging the secrets of men,” with a perfect knowledge of every case, and awarding to all, according to their characters, the felicities of heaven or the torments of hell?

IV. That regard, which we are required to pay to the Saviour, affords perhaps of all other considerations the strongest and most convincing evidence of his Godhead. This argument may not be so frequently urged, but it is more conclusive than any depending upon single words or detached texts, which possibly the ingenuity of infidels may find out a way to misconstrue, pervert, or mutilate. This enters into every part of our religion, and shews that the doctrine constitutes its very essence, and is not to be abandoned without an entire renunciation of the whole.

All true believers yield an implicit and unreserved submission to Jesus Christ. He is their “Leader and Commander,” “their Lawgiver and their King.” They bow to his sceptre, and with a full determination to obey all his injunctions they cry, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do‡?” They abhor the thought of being

* John v. 22, 23.

† Tit. ii. 13.

‡ Acts ix. 6.

“ the servants of men,” and exult in it as their honour, that they “ serve the Lord Christ*.” This is every where represented as essential to their character ; and it implies such a regard to Christ, as we are not allowed to pay to any creature.

He is also the object of their worship. They not only esteem and revere him, but they pray to him, as they dare not to any other than to the true God, and with the same profound adoration as to the Father. They are described as the persons, who “ in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord † ;” and the apostolical epistles abound with such petitions offered up to Him. This is decisive. Either the first Christians were idolaters, or else Jesus Christ is, as we maintain, very and eternal God.

That entire dependence, which believers place upon the Saviour, is such as ought not to be placed on a created being. They commit all their concerns of body and soul into his hands ; they trust to his power for support and protection ; they expect from Him the supply of all their need ; and, in this unlimited reliance upon Him, they possess unspeakable composure, confidence, and joy ‡. Now, if he be not God, their hopes may be dreadfully disappointed, and

* 1 Cor. vii. 23. Gal. i. 10. Col. iii. 24.

† 1 Cor. i. 2. Acts ix. 14. Rom. x. 13.

‡ John xiv. 1. 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9. 2 Tim. i. 12. 1 Pet. i. 8.

their prevailing temper of mind is extremely sinful. “Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord *.”

It is the essence of idolatry to love any creature, as we are required to love the most high God : and the affectionate regard which believers bear to Christ is truly idolatrous, if our doctrine be false. “The love of Christ” is that principle, which “constrains” and actuates their whole souls, and through which they are ready to sacrifice their dearest interests and connexions. Hence they burn with zeal for his name, devote their all to Him, labour and suffer, live and die, for Him †. In this principle they are not afraid of going too far : nor is there one word throughout all the scriptures, to caution us against such an excess. Does not the conclusion, then, force itself upon us, that Jesus Christ (not exclusively, but as one with the Father) is the true God, whom we should love with all our heart ‡ ?

It may be remarked, and it accords with the foregoing observation, that, with respect to those who know him, Jesus Christ is “all in all.” He is the object of their admiration, and the source of all their joy. They account it their highest honour and privilege to have fellowship with him.

* Jer. xvii. 5.

† Matt. x. 37. Rom. xiv. 7—9. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

‡ Matt. xxii. 37.

His presence and favour constitute their happiness below ; they are longing “ to depart, and to be with Christ,” which will be the consummation of their bliss above. Yes, in heaven He will be the glory and felicity of his faithful people throughout eternity *. Is not this conclusive ? Or can any thing more exalted be asserted of God the Father ?

Why, then, we ask, is this doctrine opposed ? Because (some are pleased to assert) it is unintelligible. But we maintain, it is not contrary to any clear dictate of sound reason ; and yet we pretend not to explain the incarnation of the Son of God. We may allow it to be incomprehensible, at the same time that we contend for its truth and importance. Men, who are ignorant of the evil of sin and their own depravity, may reject the whole scheme as needless, and therefore incredible. But those, who are fully apprized of the vastness of that ruin in which they are involved, will rejoice in the revelation and proposal of an Almighty Saviour.

It is granted, that the scriptures sometimes speak of Christ as being inferior to the Father ; and this is sufficiently accounted for by his assumption of humanity. It ought not to be urged as a contradiction ; for with equal truth we might be said to disbelieve the immortality of the soul,

* Gal. ii. 20. Phil. i. 21—23. Col. iii. 11. 1 Thess. iv. 17.

1 John i. 3. iii. 2. Rev. vii. 17.

when we describe man, with a reference to his body, as a frail and perishable creature. But upon the supposition that Christ is not God, what inconsistencies meet us ! What absurd criticisms become necessary, to put any plausible gloss upon the sacred writings ! And to add no more, how strange is it, that the Bible, which is expressly designed to draw us from idolatry, should continually make use of language, so exactly calculated to lead us into it !

The doctrine of the Saviour's Deity establishes a firm foundation for the Christian's hope ; but it exhibits in a striking point of view the guilt and danger of those who despise him. This is not a business of empty speculation. We ask, Who is He, that you should make light of him, and trifle with his proposals ? Most assuredly, He will vindicate his own character, and will not suffer the contemners of his grace and glory to escape with impunity. When " the great day of his wrath is come, who shall be able to stand * ?" Attend then to the solemn exhortation, " Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him †."

* Rev. vi. 17. † Psalm ii. 12.

ESSAY XXIV.

ON THE HUMILIATION OF THE SAVIOUR.

The abasement of the Saviour wonderful; but acquiesced in by faith.—The time of his appearance most suitable: the circumstances evince his grace and condescension.—He assumed our nature, and submitted to the lowest state.—As man, he has exhibited a perfect pattern,—honoured the law,—redeemed us from the curse,—and obtained for us an inheritance.

AFTER contemplating the glory which the Saviour, as THE LORD OF HOSTS, possessed before the world was, it is now proposed to fix our attentive regard upon him in that state of deepest abasement, to which he voluntarily submitted. The two subjects form an amazing contrast; such an one as may puzzle and almost confound human reason. To be properly affected with either of the two, we should consider them together; but they are too vast for our comprehension. Probably, the very angels themselves felt an overpowering astonishment upon its being announced to them, that He, whom they worshipped as their Creator and their Lord, was about to dwell on

the earth in circumstances of the lowest humiliation. Much less can we without some difficulty believe, that He, whom we behold in the meanest and most suffering condition, of which human nature is capable, yet sits upon the throne of heaven, admired and adored by all the angelic hosts, and governs the universe. The fact, however, as we have seen, is expressly declared by infallible witnesses, and confirmed by proofs not to be controverted, that it was **GOD OVER ALL**, who was pleased to manifest himself in the flesh, and to appear in the person of Jesus Christ.

If we argue on merely rational grounds, it may seem incredible; and it is allowed to be a mystery. But **FAITH** bows, as it ought, to the clear decisions of revelation; and when assured from this authority that such an union of the two natures, so far removed from each other, does really exist, it proposes no captious questions, nor requires any explanation: and probably no explanation can be given, which any finite understanding can comprehend. Instead of disputing, then, against the doctrine, which is the foundation of the Christian's hopes, and the source of his comforts, let us desire to enter into its full meaning, and to experience all its benefits. Let us read and study the word of God with humility of mind, and, while we meditate on the appearance of the Son of God as a man, and a suffering man, let us pray that we may feel the most de-

vout affections enkindled in our hearts, and be swallowed up in wonder, love, and praise.

“ When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son *.” Doubtless the most proper time was fixed on for this great event : we might conclude so, because it had been determined in the divine counsels, and by unerring wisdom. But if any should still presumptuously ask, Why was his appearance so long deferred ? we may assign some reasons †. His interposition became necessary upon the original transgression : we trust that its benefits were received by our first parents, to whom his gracious designs were announced ; and they were certainly extended to all from that period, who truly believed the promise of his coming. But the delay of four thousand years might be intended to give further proofs, that man would be totally and irrecoverably lost without such a Mediator. At least, this was undeniably established by the history of the world during that space. Full trial was afforded ; but did any of our species return unto God, and seek reconciliation of their own accord ? The improvements and progress of the arts and sciences were great ; but was any adequate atonement for sin found out, or any sufficient cure for the ma-

* Gal. iv. 4.

† See SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS, vol. iii. sect. 1. of the life of Christ, where the same thoughts are expressed. It is hoped, the repetition of them in this place will not appear improper.

ladies of the soul? Let all the fooleries of pagan superstition, which universally prevailed in most polished and learned nations, let the increasing wickedness and obduracy of men, give the answer; and the proper conclusion will be drawn, that Jesus appeared as a Saviour in a desperate case, when it had been fully evinced, that “we were without strength*.”

Many previous preparations were made for the advent of Christ, and the delay might be designed to afford time and occasion for them. The whole course of Providence, and all the antecedent revelations of God to mankind, had a reference and were directed to that one point. Prophets were raised up in a long succession to declare the divine purposes, and they all concurred in testifying, “BEHOLD, THE LORD GOD WILL COME †.” Nor was the grand event predicted merely in general terms, but the most minute circumstances respecting his appearance and abode on earth were described with an astonishing exactness. This was intended to confirm the faith and animate the hopes of ancient believers, to prepare the world for his reception, and to furnish the most incontrovertible evidence, even to the end of time, for the truth of the Gospel. In consequence of these prophecies a general expectation was raised both among Jews and Gentiles, immediately before the birth of Christ, that a glorious

* Rom. v. 6. † Isa. xl. 10.

Deliverer was about to appear. In this sense, He was "the Desire of all nations *," and he came agreeably to the hopes of those, who had learned from the predictions of Jacob and of Daniel that the appointed season was at hand, and who accordingly were then "waiting for the consolation of Israel †."

With a view to this event, which was the peculiar object of the counsels of God from the beginning, the affairs of mightiest empires had been determined for ages before. One kingdom had given place to another, till after various struggles the Romans had gained universal dominion, and established peace throughout the world. By this remarkable situation of things an intercourse was opened and maintained between different and most remote countries; and it seemed particularly intended for the speedy propagation of the Gospel. We perceive, therefore, that the time of the Saviour's coming was of all others most suitable.

If we attend to the circumstances of his appearance, we shall discover in all of them the most astonishing grace and condescension. Had He bowed the heavens and come down, as on mount Sinai, with an overpowering display of glorious majesty to make known his will;—or

* Haggai ii. 7.

† Gen. xlix. 10, Dan. ix. 24, Luke ii. 35.

had he visited the earth, according to the expectation of the Jews, like a mighty conqueror to subdue all nations and rule over them with external pomp and magnificence; even this would have been an exercise of great humiliation. But he descended far lower: He laid aside his glory, and, though he had thought it no robbery to be equal with God, he vouchsafed to become a SERVANT*. In that capacity he is said to be sent, and to receive his commission from his Father. From such like expressions we ought not to infer any original inferiority or reluctance in the Son, but only his voluntary submission; and at the same time also we remark the love of the Father, in that he withheld not his Son, his only Son from us, when our salvation was the object.

He took the human nature into an union with the divine. He was “made of a woman,”—“made flesh:” a pure and immaculate body having been prepared for his residence, by a miraculous conception through the power of the Holy Ghost in the Virgin’s womb. This is the most wonderful circumstance of all. “He took not on him the nature of angels †,” though that possibly might have been effected; and, as they seem to have been originally superior to ourselves, it would not have been so great an abasement.

* Phil. ii. 6—8.

† Heb. ii. 16.

But he stooped to our low estate, “and was made in the likeness of men,” not in appearance only, but in reality, assuming our nature with all its infirmities, except its depravity.

There were those in former times, who fancifully explained away every thing relating to the Humanity of Christ, as some also did respecting his Godhead. It was absurdly supposed, that his body was a mere phantom, and that all which is said of his labours and sufferings was an illusion. The error was dangerous as well as foolish, for it struck at the foundation of our faith. Those, therefore, who maintained it, were denounced by St. John as the abettors of Antichrist; and he has most decidedly proved against them, that Jesus Christ did truly come in the flesh, in a body every way like our own *. As the heresy has now vanished, there is little need to insist upon it in the way of argument. It should satisfy us, that many passages of the sacred scriptures in the clearest and most unequivocal language assert the real incarnation of the Son of God, and that his whole history in the most decided manner proves it. He endured hunger and thirst, weariness and pain, and at last died upon the cross, not merely in outward shew or in the opinion of spectators, but in extreme anguish, and according to the true and proper meaning of those expressions.

* 1 John iv. 2. 2 John 7.

“ God sent his own Son in the likeness of SINFUL FLESH *.” This was a further instance of humiliation. That Jesus should take up his abode amongst depraved and rebellious creatures, must have been painful to himself, and was a proof of his condescension. But it seems the more wonderful, when we view him as to his external form exactly resembling a sinner, and generally accounted such. Thus, indeed, “ he made himself of no reputation,” and submitted to reproaches the most shameful, being willing to be contemned and insulted as a fool, a demoniac, a madman, a deceiver, and even above the common rank of sinners, too vile to be suffered to live on the earth, as a blasphemer, a confederate with Satan, or as one of the devils. Perhaps he bore in his person the marks of peculiar grief, concerned as he must be for what he saw as well as for what he felt: and, all circumstances considered, it should seem that he was more afflicted than any man.

We need not detail the various transactions of his life: but through the whole we behold him in a state of deep abasement. He was born of a pious but indigent mother; and his reputed father, who was no more than a common carpenter, probably trained him up to that low and laborious occupation. The trade must have been

* Rom. viii. 3.

abandoned, when he entered on his ministry: but even then his outward situation was mean and distressing. He possessed no property, for he subsisted upon the charity of certain holy women who attended him: perhaps he was sometimes reduced to difficulties for his necessary support; at least, we know that in a more destitute condition than either the foxes or the birds of the air he had not where to lay his head *. The close of his life, especially, was most humiliating. Not to mention the unparalleled conflict and agony of mind, which he endured when forsaken of his Father, he was given up into the hands of cruel and wicked men, by whom he had long been harassed and persecuted with extreme malignity, and at last, after various insults and tortures inflicted on him, he was condemned to the most vile and excruciating death. Thus, “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross †.”

All these circumstances, so contrary to what we should have contrived or thought expedient, he foresaw, for they were expressly predicted; he made choice of them, for it was his own voluntary undertaking; and doubtless they were appointed in much wisdom: we are called upon chiefly to admire the grace and love which ap-

* Luke viii. 3, 4. Matt. xii. 1. xxi. 18. viii. 20.

† Phil. ii. 8,

peared in them. Let us say as Pilate, but with very different affections, “ Behold the man * ! ” It should confirm our faith, and enliven our hope, to perceive the prophetic description of him so exactly fulfilled; for thus it was foretold, “ He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him: he was despised, and we esteemed him not † . ”

It may be inquired, and the consideration is most important, For what purposes all this could be intended, or what could render such an humiliation necessary or expedient? We presume not to calculate all the reasons and effects of this amazing scheme. It may have respect to other worlds, of which we can know nothing. With regard to our own, some little is told us, sufficient to excite in us the most grateful and devout affections. In general we are assured, that our Lord was actuated by the most exalted and generous compassion to undertake the recovery of our fallen race. “ He loved us, and gave himself for us: ” and this indeed is love, “ which passeth knowledge ‡ . ” It is wonderful in every

* John xix. 5.

† Isaiah liii. 2, 3.

‡ Gal. ii. 20. Eph. iii. 19.

view, especially if we consider the insignificance and baseness of its object, sinful man. The glory and happiness of the Creator depended not upon him. Had he been totally destroyed, the loss could have been instantly repaired, and other beings more excellent called into existence, by the Almighty *FIAT*. And why should he be rescued, while creatures, originally of superior rank, are passed by and left to perish? This is distinguishing grace, since man of himself would not, any more than apostate angels, return to obedience: he must for ever have remained guilty, rebellious, and obdurate. And yet of this polluted race, some of the most vile and abominable have been selected to display the power and mercy of the Saviour. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound *.”

——— “For the foulest, of the foul he dies!
Most joy’d for the redeem’d from deepest guilt †!”

It would be too extensive a subject for the present essay, to enumerate even those reasons which might be assigned for his assumption of manhood. Suffice it to suggest a few considerations. His purpose was, not merely in the character of a prophet to preach righteousness and establish a system of truth, in opposition to the corruptions and errors which then prevailed; for this might

* Rom. v. 20.

† Dr. Young. Night 4.

have been effected by inferior agents. Doubtless he meant to teach by example as well as precept, and to exhibit in himself for the imitation of his church a perfect pattern of all holiness. But he had still higher ends in view, when he was "made under the law," and voluntarily subjected himself to all its injunctions. He designed by his own complete obedience in our nature to vindicate the violated honour of that law, which we had contemptuously transgressed, and to prove that its commands are all "holy, and just, and good;" for otherwise he would not have submitted to it. And who among us shall now presume to call in question its authority or excellence, when we see the Son of God stooping so low that he might fulfil it in every point? That obedience was intended also, as we shall afterwards remark, for the justification of his people, in whose name and on whose behalf he undertook to do and to suffer, whatever the law might require.

In consistence with this plan, He "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us *." He became man that he might suffer, as our representative, our ransom, our sacrifice, and that the sentence denounced against transgression might be endured in the very nature, which had sinned. He "suffered for us IN

* Gal. iii. 13.

THE FLESH," and "bare our sins IN HIS OWN BODY on the tree*." Without the human nature, it should seem, this would have been impossible. At least, the incarnation appears a wise and gracious expedient. "For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." And therefore "as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage†." Behold him, then, in our nature submitting to the sentence of the law, and learn how immensely great is the evil of sin! By the cross is exhibited to the view of the universe the tremendous justice of our God. While we hear the righteous Governor exclaim, "Awake, O sword, against the man that is my fellow‡;" O let us not presume that we may transgress with impunity!

By the incarnation of the Son of God, provision was made for something more than the removal of the penalty from us, and the satisfaction of divine justice; our reception into the favour and family of God is secured. This is an astonish-

* 1 Pet. ii. 24. iv. 1. † Heb. ii. 10, 14. ‡ Zech. xiii. 7.

ing display of love. Rebels are freely pardoned, and obtain even a higher place than that which they had forfeited; they “receive the adoption of sons *;”—“heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ †.” What a rich privilege! What a distinguished honour! They have access to God with confidence and joy, through Jesus as their elder brother. He feels for them in their present distresses, having once experienced similar trials and temptations, and “he is able to succour them ‡.” He is even one with them, and they with Him; and they are assured that where He is, they shall shortly be, “that they may behold his glory §.”

From this view of our Lord’s humiliation, it is obvious to remark that those passages of the scriptures, which speak of or imply his inferiority to the Father, admit of an easy and fair explanation, consistent with the doctrine of his Deity. They refer, evidently, to his human nature; and on this interpretation there is a perfect harmony and congruity in the various descriptions given of his person and character. But if we exclude his divinity, to get rid of some apparent difficulties, we shall involve ourselves in still greater, and render the Bible not only hard to be understood, but replete with contradictions never to be reconciled.

* Gal. iv. 5. † Rom. viii. 17. ‡ Heb. ii. 17, 18. iv. 15.

§ John xvii. 22—24.

How interesting is the subject! Do we understand its importance? or are we suitably affected with it? These are the things which “the angels desire to look into* ;” and surely there is a greater obligation upon us to do so. Let us contemplate the suffering Saviour, till we are brought to the actual enjoyment of those blessings which he came to procure for us. Let us accompany him in his lowest humiliation, and “arm ourselves with the same mind†.” “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him‡.” He surely deserves our warmest affections and most strenuous exertions. Let us not shrink from his service, however arduous, or deem any office beneath us, by which we may promote his glory. Let us cheerfully take up the cross, and “go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach§.” O that the same mind may be in us, which was also in Him, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame;” and then finally we shall “sit with him in his throne¶!”

But “if we deny him, He also will deny us.” Is it nothing to us, that he stooped so low, and endured so much? Or are we at liberty to reject his gracious offers with disdain? Surely, there can be no guilt equal to that of despising our

* 1 Pet. i. 12. † 1 Pet. iv. 1. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12.

§ Heb. xiii. 13. ¶ Heb. xii. 2. Rev. iii. 21.

suffering Redeemer. The contempt of him, as viewed in his dignity and glory, is base, and if persisted in must be fatal ; but the contempt of that love, which brought him from heaven, and animated him in his deepest humiliation, is inconceivably more heinous and abominable. O let us be ashamed and afraid of sinning more than the inhabitants of Sodom could ! Let us listen with holy wonder and delight to that voice, which still addresses us in mercy, “ Look unto me, and be ye saved * ! ”

* Isa. xlv. 22.

ESSAY XXV.

ON THE PROPHETICAL CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST.

Jesus appeared as a Prophet,—according to ancient predictions,—resembled Moses,—taught the obligations of the divine law, in its extent and spirituality, and the necessity of regeneration,—preached salvation through faith in his blood,—and foretold many future events. Never man spake with so much wisdom,—tenderness,—and authority. Yet he is disregarded in this character.

THE Lord Jesus Christ constitutes the essence of our religion. He is the Alpha and Omega; the very life and soul, which enters into every part, and animates the whole of our system. The knowledge of his character, therefore, is of the greatest possible importance, and it will be proper to give it a full and serious consideration. As we are proceeding to examine and contemplate the work which he undertook and performed for our redemption, let us in the first place fix our attentive regard upon him as sustaining the office of a PROPHET.

On this point there is no difference of opinion among those called Christians: all such are agreed, and even Mahometans themselves allow, that Jesus Christ was “a teacher come from God.” It had been predicted, that the promised Saviour should appear in that capacity for the instruction of the world: and accordingly it was generally expected, that he would bring with him extraordinary revelations, and make an unreserved declaration of the divine will. “I know that MESSIAS cometh;”—said the woman of Samaria: “When he is come he will tell us all things*.” The question was put to John the Baptist, “Art thou THAT PROPHET†?” And upon our Lord’s manifestation, many persons thus acknowledged their conviction, “This is of a truth THAT PROPHET that should come into the world‡.”

Peculiar care is taken in the new testament to prove that Jesus Christ has fulfilled every description given of the Redeemer throughout the old; and among other instances both St. Peter and St. Stephen maintain, that he is the person, of whom Moses said unto the Fathers, “A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that Prophet, shall be de-

* John iv. 25.

† John i. 21.

‡ John vi. 14. vii. 40,

stroyed from among the people*.” Can any thing be more interesting to us, than to be assured that this ancient scripture has received its exact completion? Amidst the darkness of human reason, it should be matter of great joy to know that One so perfectly qualified has appeared, to communicate light to our benighted minds, “and to guide our feet into the way of peace †.” Let us consider, as those who are truly solicitous to understand and practise their duty, what regard is due to him in this character, that we come not under the tremendous denunciation of the divine displeasure.

According to the declaration of Moses, then, Jesus was “raised up” unto the nation of Israel, “of their brethren;” not merely as he assumed the human nature, and became “the seed of the woman,” but as his virgin mother was a lineal descendant of Jacob, and therefore he was the kinsman and brother of the Jews. He has also fulfilled the prediction, as being “like unto Moses,” who was an eminent type of the Saviour, though very far inferior. All comparisons indeed must be inadequate, considering the infinite dignity and important offices of Him, who “cometh from heaven, and is above all ‡.” Yet, exalted as he is, we may perceive a striking re-

* Acts iii. 22, 23.—vii. 37. Deut. xviii. 15—19.

† Luke i. 78. ‡ John iii. 31.

semblance between him and the Jewish prophet. Both were divinely commissioned as public teachers to declare the will of God, and to be the founders of a religious system, superior to any which had ever been instituted before. Both appeared in the character of Mediator, and offered up fervent intercessions on behalf of those whom they represented. They wrought a similar deliverance, Moses from Egyptian, Christ from spiritual bondage. Each was “given for a leader and commander” as well as “a witness to the people*.” They spake therefore with authority, as legislators, and demanded obedience to their precepts. They were qualified for their office by divine communications, far beyond any preceding prophet †. But who could be acquainted with the counsels of the Almighty, like unto Jesus? “The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared him ‡.” No man therefore could say, in the same extensive sense, with respect to the mysteries of heaven, “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen §.”

“We ought to give the more earnest heed ¶” to the doctrines which he has delivered. Many, alas! are satisfied with a general acknowledgment of his character, as if it were enough to

* Isa. lv. 4. † Numb. xii. 8. Deut. xxxiv. 10—12.

‡ John i. 18.

§ John iii. 11.

¶ Heb. ii. 1.

allow the truth or excellency of his system, without knowing any one principle which it contains. How absurd and sinful is this indifference! While we care not what he teaches, we must be considered as contemning his authority, not less than those who treat him as an impostor. Have we then understood, or ever seriously listened to him? With what dispositions have we heard or read his word? Is it our unfeigned desire to “seek the law at his mouth?” Let us diligently examine the sacred records, for our instruction in righteousness, and we shall find that the following were the principal subjects of his preaching.

1. With an evident view to produce conviction of sin, he maintained the authority, and explained the spiritual meaning, of the divine law. In opposition to the corrupt glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, he shewed that it requires perfect purity in the heart, and condemns an offender in thought or desire, as well as in any external act. He corrected the various errors, by which false teachers were imposing upon themselves or others, and warned the people to beware of their doctrine. He reproved many prevailing iniquities, and inculcated the practice of moral and religious duties *. These surely are matters of unspeakable importance.

2. He called men to repentance, as indispen-

* Matt. v. vi. vii. xxiii. Mark vii. 1—13. Luke xvi. 18—22.

sably requisite for their admission into his church and kingdom, and proved from the fallen and depraved state of human nature the universal necessity of regeneration *. According to our Lord's position, then, no person, whatever be his life and conversation, can be a Christian, who is not "born again," and become "a new creature." On this ground he severely reprehended the hypocrisy and false dependences of those, who were satisfied with an external sanctity, and "trusted in themselves that they were righteous:" and he shewed, that with all their boasts their state was dangerous, and their principles most odious to God. He admonished them, therefore, to seek for inward holiness, as well as to manifest an outward decency and regularity of conduct †. Let us consider him as delivering the same instructions and exhortations unto us, and examine whether we possess "the power" as well as "the form of godliness."

3. He preached the glad tidings of pardon and peace, and promised the gracious assistance of his Holy Spirit to all, who would accept the offer through faith in his name ‡. This is the substance of the Gospel; and we are assured He was anointed to the prophetic office, that he might proclaim this glad sound. He himself

* Mark i. 15. Luke xiii. 1—5. John iii. 1—8.

† Matt. xv. 1—20. xxiii. 25, 26. Luke xvi. 15. xviii. 9—14.

‡ John iii. 14—18. vi. 27—58. vii. 37—39. Luke xi. 13.

maintained in the presence of his enemies, that he came agreeably to the ancient prediction of Isaiah, under the divine unction, “to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord*.” He encouraged all men therefore, who were oppressed with the burden of their sins and the dread of divine wrath, to trust in him for deliverance. He represented himself as “the Author of eternal salvation,” his death as the sacrifice for which it is bestowed, and faith as the instrument by which it is received †. Who can remain indifferent about such momentous truths? Or who does not welcome with grateful acclamations the Herald, who proclaims so joyful a message?

4. As a Prophet, he foretold many future events. The accomplishment of some of these has already demonstrated his veracity, and left us no room to doubt that the others also will take place in due season. He denounced the most tremendous vengeance against the Jews for their unbelief, and described in a most circumstantial manner the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem. He predicted the total dispersion of the Jews, and the desolation of their country, the

* Isaiah lxi. 1, 2. Luke iv. 16—21.

† Matt. xi. 28. John xii. 23—33. xiv. 6.

persecution of his disciples, and the propagation of the Gospel among the Gentiles*. He spake beforehand also with an astonishing minuteness concerning his own death and resurrection†. And all these things have occurred with an exact conformity to his declarations. We look therefore for the completion of his words respecting the end of this present system, and the everlasting state of all mankind. He has told us, that he will come again in his glory, that at his command the grave shall give up their dead, that the whole human race shall be arraigned at his judgment-seat, and that he will take the righteous to reign with him in his kingdom, whilst he will doom the wicked by an irreversible sentence to never-ending punishment, in fire prepared for the devil and his angels‡. Can the most careless persons be inattentive to such a Preacher? “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

From this short description of our Lord’s ministry, it is undeniable that he is not to be considered as a Teacher of mere morality, and that his Gospel contains much more than a system of Ethics, however complete. Are we not impressed with the wisdom, grace, and majesty, which appeared in all the doctrines and exhortations of this great Prophet? Or can we refrain from joining in the testimony of the officers, who went to

* Matt. xxiii. and xxiv.

† Matt. xvi. 21. xvii. 22. xx. 17—19. ‡ Matt. xxv.

apprehend him, "Never man spake like this man*?" Let us dwell on the thought of his superior excellency.

1. Never man spake with so much wisdom. Whatever may be advanced in praise of the admired writers of Greece or Rome and their respective systems, compared with Jesus of Nazareth they were altogether void of understanding. "They groped in the dark without light." To say nothing of the folly and wickedness of idolatry, which disgrace their pages, even their best moral instructions, if collected together, fall far short of that pure and extensive righteousness required in the Gospel: and the noblest motives of duty they knew not how to inculcate. But more especially we perceive their total ignorance of the method or even the possibility of obtaining forgiveness and reconciliation with God, and of that "life and immortality which Jesus hath brought to light†." The ancient Jewish prophets, it may be said, instructed the world in those important points. But they were only His messengers, commissioned to testify of Him; and, though their doctrines were in perfect harmony with his, and formed a part of the same plan, yet in them we discover much comparative obscurity. They were as the faint glimmering of the twilight, announcing the approach of day: Jesus is

* John vii. 46.

† 2 Tim. i. 10.

“ the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world * ;”—“ the Sun of righteousness †,” which hath arisen upon us with supereminent glory and majesty.

Should it be argued, that the Apostles were equally if not more intelligent, because their declarations of evangelical truth were still more clear and explicit than those of their Master, let it be recollected that they were taught of him, and obtained from him after his death a more full revelation of the great scheme, than he had thought expedient to give them in his life ‡. By them therefore he continued to illuminate the earth, and carried on his prophetical work, after his ascension into heaven. Even so it is now. He raises up faithful witnesses for his name, whom he teaches by his Spirit, and makes use of for the instruction of others. But if they preach or write to any good effect, the influence and the glory must be ascribed to Him alone.

2. Never man spake with so much tenderness and encouragement, especially to the weak. This is so obvious through the whole of his ministry, that Isaiah’s prediction was manifestly fulfilled in him ; “ A bruised reed shall he not break ; and the smoking flax shall he not quench : He shall bring forth judgment unto truth §.” All were invited and earnestly entreated to listen to his

* John i. 9. † Mal. iv. 2. ‡ John xvi. 12, 13.

§ Isaiah xlii. 3. Matt. xii. 20.

gracious words, and to share the blessings of his salvation. But he shewed a peculiar regard to the poor and afflicted, and pronounced his best benedictions upon them, who were weighed down with penitential sorrow, with infirmities or temptations*. Whose petition did he ever reject? Or whom did he treat with insult or disdain? To the mourning penitent his constant language was, "Peace be unto thee; Be of good cheer." He patiently bore with the perverseness of malignant enemies, who were watching and cavilling at all his expressions. He wept over the city, which "set at nought all his counsel, and would none of his reproof." Even after they had shed his blood, he sent fresh offers of mercy, and commanded salvation to be preached to them in his name; and no sooner were some of them humbled at his feet, than he administered consolation unto them†. What unparalleled meekness is this!

3. Never man spake with so much authority. Many of the best Pagan teachers lamented the inefficacy of their exhortations and precepts to reform the world, because they wanted power to enforce them. It seemed desirable, therefore, that One should appear, who from his high rank could demand attention and obedience. This defect was in some measure remedied, when it pleased

* Isaiah lxi. 1, &c. Matt. v. 3, 4. xi. 28.

† Luke xix. 41. xxiv. 47. Acts ii. 38.

God to speak by his ancient servants the prophets. They could address their hearers with a solemnity and majesty of diction, which moralists and philosophers could not use: and how impressive must have been the call, which was prefaced with “Thus saith the Lord of hosts!” But even they were only inferior servants, and probably often uttered what they understood not. Jesus Christ is “Lord of all,” and his infinite superiority must be manifest to every one, who seriously listens to his discourses. With what dignity does he issue out his commands, as being no other than the Lawgiver himself, “Verily, verily, I say unto you!” And he pronounces both promises and threatenings, as being able by his own sovereign power to save or to destroy. Many therefore “were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes*.” His most captious and malignant hearers were often made to feel, that he possessed the knowledge as well as majesty peculiar to Divinity. For, while he confounded them by discovering their most secret purposes and objections, what can we conclude, but that He, who “declareth unto man what is his thought, is the Lord; the God of hosts is his name †?”

Is such a Prophet, then, to be despised with impunity? No: the tremendous sentence will

* Matt. vii. 28, 29. † Amos iv. 13.

be carried into effect ; “ Every soul, which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.” It was in execution of this sentence that Jerusalem was given up to desolation, and so many thousands perished miserably ; “ because they knew not the time of their visitation *.” To this also we ascribe all the calamities, which the Jews have suffered since that time : and they remain to this day a warning to all people, as exhibiting the wrath of God for the contempt put upon his Son. Similar visitations may not be inflicted upon us in the present world, but the sentence will not therefore fall to the ground. The honour of this exalted Prophet will be vindicated in the final perdition of all unbelievers. O may we fear to continue in such a state !

Who are they, that unfeignedly receive him, or treat him with suitable regard ? Those only, who with serious reverence attend to his instructions, and treasure up his word in their hearts : —those, who, being convinced of their own ignorance, desire to be taught of him, who read, and hear, and pray, with an humble disposition, willing and determined to follow, wherever He shall lead or direct. Such, it should seem, was Nicodemus : and persons of this character at all times will obtain his blessing. They “ shall

* Luke xix. 44.

know of the doctrine, whether it be of God *.” Their difficulties will be gradually removed by increasing light communicated from him, who is the fountain of all wisdom †. “The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way ‡.” Thus will he graciously conduct them to heaven, where, the veil being taken away, they shall “see face to face, and know even as they are known §.”

But there are various descriptions even of nominal Christians, who do in effect refuse to hear the Saviour. Some, who are fond of insisting on his prophetic office, as if he sustained no other, dishonour him in this very capacity: for they select what parts of his doctrine they please, or by unnatural criticisms put a force upon his words, that they may accommodate them to their own depraved sentiments and inclinations. Now, if we do not credit him “in all things whatsoever he shall say unto us,” we do not truly credit him in any. Or, if we “lean to our own understanding,” from a proud conceit of the sufficiency of our Reason to direct us without any divine illumination, the case is the same: we presumptuously set up ourselves as wise, and reject his teaching. Alas! how many are offended on this account, and cry out, “Are we blind also ||?” Perhaps there is a more numerous class of others,

* John vii. 17. † Prov. iv. 18. ‡ Psal. xxv. 9.

§ 1 Cor. xiii. 12. || John ix. 40.

of whom he himself declares, they cannot be his disciples. Such are they, who will not abandon their sins, or deny themselves, and take up their cross to follow him: such, who will not suffer all extremities for his sake, but prefer their earthly friends, possessions, and enjoyments, to his favour and his glory *. Let all these be separated from the visible church, and then, alas! how few will be found to have yielded an unfeigned subjection to him!

May he cause his light to be diffused, and his truth to prevail, not only among ourselves, but to the ends of the earth, that it may be said to every nation under heaven, “ Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee † !” Amen.

* Luke xiv. 25 – 33.

† Isaiah lx. 1.

ESSAY XXVI.

ON THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS CHRIST.

The general influence of example. Necessity of a consistent conduct in public teachers. Jesus Christ is the only perfect pattern. We should aim at an imitation of his character, I. With respect to God,—subjection to his will,—constant and cheerful obedience,—zeal for his glory,—ardent devotion,—patient resignation. II. With respect to himself,—condescension and submission,—magnanimity,—and heavenly-mindedness. III. With respect to men,—firmness in resisting evil,—subjection to parents and governors,—kindness and compassion,—forbearance and love of enemies.

THE power of example is so great, as even to become proverbial. Men of all ages, ranks, and characters, feel its influence; and therefore our own conduct as well as comfort may greatly depend on the kind of persons with whom we may associate, or on the connexions we may form in life. “Evil communications corrupt good manners*.” How many deplorable instances of de-

* 1 Cor. xv. 33.

pravity and ruin in families, towns, and nations, confirm the observation ! The contrary effects produced by a pattern of real excellence are not so general or extensive : yet such a pattern cannot but prove a blessing.

A consistent and honourable deportment is indispensably requisite in a public teacher of virtue and religion, in order to gain attention or give efficacy to his instructions and exhortations. All human teachers indeed are imperfect, and they ought not rashly to be condemned for every deviation from the path of rectitude. Allowances should be made, from the consideration of that strong propensity to evil in our fallen nature, which they must feel in common with others. But great usefulness may be expected from their labours, when they can call upon their hearers, as St. Paul, “ Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample *.” Yet even that eminent apostle could not propose his own conduct for imitation without some reserve, declaring it was only so far to be regarded, as it was conformable to the pure and spotless character of the Saviour : “ Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ †.”

Here then we have a pattern of extensive and universal goodness, which may be recommended

* Phil. iii. 17.

† 1 Cor. xi. 1.

without any limitation. Jesus has exhibited in himself all that holiness, in every branch of duty, of which as a Prophet he taught the necessity. His life was intended to be such an exemplification of his precepts, that we might see in his obedience not only the authority but the excellency of that law, which is given for the regulation of our conduct. This was not the sole or principal design for which he condescended to dwell on the earth; though it seems to be so considered by mere Moralists and Socinians. The subject ought not, however, to be neglected; for it forms an important and essential part of the Christian system; and, if duly regarded, will carry us much farther than many of those, who chiefly insist upon it, may imagine or desire. O that we may so contemplate this model of all perfection, that, beholding in Him "as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord *!"

It may be allowed, that in some respects he cannot be proposed as a proper pattern for us. There are parts of his conduct, of which it would be presumptuous to attempt an imitation. Many miraculous works he performed by the exertion of a divine power; and many things he did in a character peculiar to himself as Mediator: in all

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

which there is no precept requiring us to resemble him. Only we remark, that the general principle, by which he was actuated even in those instances, is such as we ourselves should possess. But in the whole of that obedience, which he rendered to the law of God, we behold no more than an exact delineation of what we ought to be. Through the depraved affections of the flesh, indeed, we shall always find in ourselves a lamentable deficiency; but these depraved affections we must not justify, or suppose that they give us a licence to sin. Deploing our failures, we should continually renew our endeavours, still keeping this finished model in our view, that we may come nearer and nearer to it.

Let us consider the excellency of the character of Jesus Christ, as a pattern for our imitation,

I. With respect to God. Though he were a Son, he became a servant, and as such “learned obedience *;” and in the whole of his life he consulted not any private or exclusive wishes of his own, but the mind of his Father. “I came down from heaven,” said he, “not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me †.” He yielded an entire subjection of all his faculties, and conformed to every precept, observing, “Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness ‡.” From a full consciousness, therefore, of perfect inno-

* Heb. v. 8.

† John vi. 38.

‡ Matt. iii. 15.

cence, he could appeal to his malignant enemies, who had narrowly watched his conduct, “Which of you convinceth me of sin *?” There was no moment in which his regard to the rule of duty was at all abated †. His exertions for the accomplishment of his great work were unremitting. The time was short, and much to be done. Under this impression he exclaimed, “I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work ‡.” Nor did he perform this obedience with reluctance: it was cheerful as well as constant and entire. Who could say like him, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work §?” Such was his ardour, and such it continued to the very close of life. Without perseverance the whole would have been unavailing. But upon his quitting the world and returning to his Father, he could declare, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do ||.” How excellent, how amiable the character! Can we bear to be compared with it? Yet shall we aim at any thing short? Or is there any one point of duty to our God, in which at any one moment we should desire a liberty to transgress?

The purity and sublimity of his motives rendered his services of transcendent worth in the

* John viii. 46.

† viii. 29.

‡ John ix. 4.

§ John iv. 34.

|| John xvii. 4.

sight of Heaven. His whole soul was actuated by a fervent and unmixed concern for the glory of God. For the attainment of this object he sacrificed his own reputation, and subjected himself to the most contemptuous and outrageous treatment. “ I seek not mine own glory,” said he ; “ but I honour my Father, though ye do dishonour me *.” Such also should be our inward principle in every action of life : nor do we understand our religion, if its influence do not abide with us and regulate our pursuits and practices. The precept is indeed most exalted ; but let us not plead that it is above our reach : it is universally binding upon all Christians ; “ Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God †.” Let us be ashamed of our selfishness. How little has God been regarded in our most specious and boasted duties !

From the account now given we shall not wonder to find, that Jesus exhibited an example of ardent devotion, and constantly attended to all the public offices and ordinances of religion. He honoured and sanctified the sacred season of the sabbath, and “ his custom was” to frequent the synagogues, wherever he had opportunity, and to bear a part in divine worship ‡. He went up, we are assured, to celebrate all the instituted feasts at Jerusalem ; and such was his regard to

* John viii. 49, 50.

† 1 Cor. x. 31.

‡ Luke iv. 16.

the sacred services of the temple, such the boldness and fervency of his zeal in correcting certain prevailing profanations and abuses, as excited general astonishment. His disciples alone could account for it *. His high sense of the importance of meditation and private prayer was fully evinced. We are at no loss to conclude in what manner his hours were employed, and what were the exercises of his soul, when he retired to the garden of Gethsemane, or when “ he rose up a great while before day,” or when in the evening “ he departed to a mountain and was there alone,” or when, as we read, “ he continued all night in prayer to God †.” But we perceive at what an immense distance we stand from this great exemplar of piety; and we deplore the negligence, sloth, and formality, which mark and disgrace the generality of his professed followers.

He suffered from the hand of his God; for the bitter cup is represented as administered by Him. It is impossible for us to calculate or conceive the magnitude or the poignancy of his trials, both in body and mind, the pains of the former or the anguish of the latter; especially when considered as inflicted by his righteous Father, who seemed to forsake him in his last extre-

* John ii. 17. † Luke xxii. 39. John xviii. 1. 2.
Mark i. 35. Matt. xiv. 23. Luke vi. 12.

mity *. Yet what do we hear from his lips? Any thing like distrust or murmuring? Quite the reverse. What an entire, unreserved, and patient submission do those words imply! “Not my will, but thine be done.” “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour: Father, glorify thy name!”—“The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” With such a pattern before us, shall we complain of our light afflictions, or petulantly arraign the God of heaven?—What mean we by our peevishness and discontent, while yet we call ourselves the disciples of Jesus?—We consider his character

II. With respect to himself, and contemplate the graces which were exhibited in the regulation of all his principles and tempers. What an assemblage of excellencies meet our view, and excite our admiration! Surely we are constrained to pray, O that we were made like unto him!

He, the great Lord of all, divested himself of his original dignity, and stooped from a state of the highest elevation and felicity to a condition the most ignominious and afflicted: a pattern of condescension and humility never to be paralleled! It is therefore insisted on as the strongest argument against selfishness and vain-glory †.

* Matt. xxvii. 46. Luke xxii. 42. John xii. 27, 28. xviii. 11.

† Phil. ii. 3—8.

With such an instance before us, shall we puny and polluted creatures indulge an arrogant conceit of our own consequence, and be unwilling to sacrifice the least personal advantage or accommodation? Let us listen to the voice of our Master, “Come, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart *.” Will it not most effectually mortify our pride, and shame us out of our habits of carnal indulgence, to take an attentive view of all that meanness and suffering, to which he voluntarily submitted? He purposely avoided every appearance of shew and ostentation, and would have none of that display of pomp and grandeur, which men so much admire and covet. Though he might have commanded all the wealth and magnificence of the world, or even the attendance of myriads of angels, he chose a situation of lowest indigence. “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister †.” In the form of a menial servant, he washed the feet of his disciples, that he might teach them a lesson of humility and love: for he added, “I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you ‡.” How forcible then is the appeal to all who believe in him, “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich §!”

* Matt. xi. 28, 29.

† Matt. xx. 28.

‡ John xiii. 15.

§ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

O plead no more for “ the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life ;” but follow Him, who by his practice as well as precept requires you to “ deny yourselves and take up your cross daily *!”

Much is said in commendation of that fortitude, by which men are excited to maintain the public welfare in contempt of danger, suffering, and death. But, not to mention that what is extolled as Heroism is frequently no better than fool-hardiness, or may spring from ambition, where was there ever such an instance of true magnanimity and generous courage, as our Lord displayed? The agonies which awaited him were extreme, and he foresaw them all ; yet he did not shrink from or repent of his undertaking. But, with the full view of his approaching Passion and all its painful circumstances, he seemed to rush forward with eagerness to meet the trying moment. When going to die at Jerusalem, as if his cross would prove his most glorious victory and triumph, he went before his disciples, till they were amazed and afraid to follow : and so far was he from dreading that Baptism of blood, which he was to undergo, he cried, “ How am I straitened, till it be accomplished † !” Shall our Captain be so valiant for our sakes, and his soldiers betray a shameful cowardice in his cause?

* Luke ix. 23. † Mark x. 32. Luke xii. 50.

Let us hear the apostle's application, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind *."

He was such an inhabitant as seemed not to belong to the earth, being superior to all its allurements, and living under the continual influence of high and heavenly affections †. Here we see the real excellence and dignity of his character. From his whole conduct and conversation it was obvious that he had no low motives or desires to be gratified as to this world; and that such was the holiness and spirituality of his mind, so elevated were his thoughts and meditations, he was ever aspiring after things above. Is it consistent, then, for us to be so engrossed with sensual gratifications or any of our temporal affairs, as if they constituted the true or chief felicity of man? Let us put the question, when we are doubtful about the propriety or lawfulness of any practice, What would Jesus have done, if placed in our circumstances? The case would soon be resolved. Can we suppose, that he would have allowed himself in pleasures, which we call innocent; or that he would have frequented those places and companies, to which we delight to resort?

We consider the nature and excellency of his example,

III. With respect to men. This will open a

* 1 Pet. iv. 1. † John xvii. 16.

large field for inquiry : for, connected as we are by various bonds and relations in society, we should examine whether we are copying after our exalted Head in “ rendering to all their dues.”

He stands as a pattern, to persons of a public character especially, for his invincible firmness in resisting the corrupt maxims and evil practices of “ a crooked and perverse nation.” We perceive him, so far from countenancing what was wrong by any mean compliances, boldly reprov-
ing sin at the risk of life itself. Let his faithful rebukes and solemn denunciations be read with care, and then say, whether we are followers of Christ, whilst we are accommodating ourselves to the depraved sentiments and customs of men, through the fear of persecution. He incurred reproach and malignant opposition, and the true reason is assigned, “ because he testified of the world, that the works thereof were evil*.” It may be possible to avoid this by a time-serving spirit ; for “ if ye were of the world, the world would love his own †.” But how dishonourable to those who call themselves Christians ! “ Fear ye not the reproach of men:”—“ for consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds ‡.”

* John vii. 7.

† John xv. 19.

‡ Isa. li. 7. Heb. xii. 3.

He was inflexible in resisting evil, yet not from pride or moroseness ; for he yielded respect and submission, wherever they were due. Exalted as his character was, he refused not to be subject, in the capacity of a child, to his mother and to his reputed father Joseph. Young people should learn from him modesty of deportment and a reverential regard to their superiors. For, after such an instance, who shall call in question the propriety of that precept, “ Children, obey your parents * ? ” He has taught us also to give honour and support to magistrates. He wrought a miracle to prove his readiness to pay tribute †, and commanded obedience even to a Nero ‡. Have his professed disciples in the present day forgotten both the exhortation and the practice of their Master ? To an ignorance or a contempt of the real nature of our religion we must ascribe the tumultuous spirit which lately appeared among us, and the propagation of those principles, which threatened to subvert all constituted authorities and good order in society.

We are referred especially to the example before us for an astonishing display of disinterested and universal kindness and compassion. Love, the most fervent and active, love the most extensive and impartial towards men of all ranks and characters, appeared to be the ruling principle of

* Eph. vi. 1.

† Matt. xvii. 24.

‡ Matt. xxii. 21,

his mind. This brought him down from heaven, and carried him through all his painful labours and exquisite agonies on earth. Under this influence, “he went about doing good *.” The poor, and the distressed of every description, were the peculiar objects of his benevolent attention. As to silver and gold he had little to communicate, yet even of that little stock, which was furnished by the hand of charity, something was spared for those, who might be more indigent †. Touched with pity for the fainting multitudes, he satisfied their craving hunger by his miraculous operations; and in the same way he healed their bodily infirmities, giving health to the sick, strength to the disabled, and even life to the dead ‡. The vastness and the ardour of his love to the souls of men were evinced, not only by his preaching the glad tidings of salvation, but chiefly by his offering up himself a sacrifice for their redemption. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends §.” O for the same spirit to actuate all his members! This would subdue that little selfishness, which prevents or cramps their exertions: it would quench that flame of discord, which has caused such devastation in the church; and it would unite them in closest bonds of fervent affection to one another. “Be ye therefore followers of

* Acts x. 38. † John xiii. 29.

‡ Matt. ix. 36. xi. 5. xiv. 14. § John xv. 19.

God as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us *."

The kindness of our Redeemer will seem the more wonderful, if we view the exercises of it towards his injurious and malignant enemies. For consider, what was his exalted character; how unmerited and base the opposition raised against him; with what ease he might have averted or avenged their cruelties by confounding and destroying them for ever! Yet he bore with all their perverseness; he desisted not from seeking their good; he entreated them to receive his mercy, and lamented their obstinate refusal. "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not †." O what a trial and proof of his patience and meekness! Yet, difficult as it may be, this is the example, which we are required to imitate. Shall we, then, indulge or justify any bitterness or resentment of spirit? Are we unwilling to drop our little quarrels, and forget our animosities for ever? View the Saviour dissolved in tears over Jerusalem: hear him in his expiring moments breathing out a prayer for his murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do:" and observe, that to them he not only sent the first offer, but actually communicated the blessings of redemption ‡!

* Eph. v. 1. 2. † 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

‡ Luke xxiii. 34. xxiv. 47. Acts ii.

Can we want any stronger argument for the exercise of mutual forbearance and forgiveness? Or shall we now refuse to “love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them which despitefully use us and persecute us *?”—“Implacable, unmerciful †,” must be the character of those, who know not Jesus Christ.

The whole of this subject is calculated, not to cherish a pharisaical pride, but to alarm the consciences of the formal and the careless. Something more is requisite in religion than they have imagined. If we extend our views and take in the whole compass of duty, or even if we fix our regard on any one point, by which to examine our own obedience, or degree of conformity to this pattern of righteousness, we shall all be found continually and shamefully defective. Let us yield to this conviction of guilt; and not presume to plead, that we have perfectly fulfilled the law, as Jesus did: let us pray, that his blood may cleanse us, and his “garment of salvation” cover and adorn us!

Yet an imitation of Jesus Christ is a matter of indispensable obligation. It is implied in all his invitations to follow him, and come after him ‡: and, if we refuse it, our Christian profession is inconsistent and hypocritical. His redeemed people

* Matt. v. 44. † Rom. i. 31.

‡ Luke ix. 23, 59. John xii. 26.

are uniformly represented as renewed by his Spirit after his image, and thus they “ put on Christ” in righteousness and true holiness *. This then is the grand evidence required, without which he will not recognize us, nor ought we to be satisfied in our own consciences. “ He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked †.” Most assuredly, none can reign with him in heaven, but those who are made meet for the society and employment of that holy place by the sanctification of their natures. Such may rejoice in the expectation, that he will go on to purify them by his grace, and subdue in them all remaining opposition to his will. At length he will “ present them to himself, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing ‡.” May every reader be able to say, “ I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness § !” Amen.

* Rom. viii. 29. Col. iii. 10. Gal. iii. 27. † 1 John ii. 6.

‡ Eph. v. 27. § Psalm xvii. 15.

ESSAY XXVII.

ON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF JESUS CHRIST.

The obedience of Christ was designed to be more than an example. The law requires from us a perfect righteousness,—which we cannot perform,—but the gospel provides. Christ fulfilled the law for us.—His righteousness meritorious,—imputed to believers,—so represented by Prophets and Apostles. But the faith, which receives it, is not meritorious. The doctrine guarded, and improved.

IT is the undeniable duty of Christians to consider the character of their Lord as an example to themselves. But their imitation of him is so defective, as to preclude every idea of its being a proper ground of self-complacency, or of confidence towards God. In that obedience also, which he performed, he had further designs than merely to propose himself as a Pattern: He meant that the benefits of his obedience should be extended to his believing people in all ages, by its being imputed to them, and thus procuring their entire justification. Or, in prophetic language, his purpose was, “to bring in everlasting righteousness*.”

* Dan. ix. 24.

This is a subject of peculiar importance ; but it has excited much controversy. We shall not, however, in these plain and practical essays, enter into debate, or attend to any refined or scholastic distinctions. Our object is, to inquire what doctrines are clearly revealed to us in the scriptures. These we should cordially receive and maintain, though opposed by respectable names, or aspersed in terms the most opprobrious.

The question before us is, “ How shall man be just with God ? ” We are required to render an exact and perpetual obedience to the divine law : and, considering the extent and spirituality of its precepts, we must allow that nothing less than a perfect righteousness will be adequate to its demands. With the most authoritative language, “ Do this,” it is continually calling us to the observance of all its injunctions, nor will it admit of any excuse for transgression in any possible circumstances whatever. Under this law we were created, and still remain ; for nothing can release us from our obligations. The holy Lord God cannot give us a licence to be unholy, nor can he receive us under that character into his blissful presence. It is often said, that he will accept our sincere though defective obedience, and that we have no reason to fear, if we do the best we can. But we ask, Is this the condition of the law ? Or can the extent of this condition be precisely ascertained ? Nothing can be more

lax than the general plea of sincerity and of acting up to one's ability; for it seems to consist with every kind of deviation from the rule of duty, and to include no more than the performance of what may suit each man's inclination or convenience. Such a plea will not bear examination, or give solid satisfaction to a serious mind. For if your claims be grounded on your own works, the question will continually recur, Is not more required? Or do not our failures expose us to condemnation? And there is sufficient cause for your apprehension. All your works must be perfect, or else you will be dealt with as transgressors. Have you such works to produce? Are not your best services defiled with strange mixtures and corrupt motives? And may you not fear, that a God of purity will reject them with disdain? "If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts *."

The divine law will abate nothing of its demands on account of man's depravity. Indeed, how could we expect it? Shall the righteous God recede from his just claims upon us, because we are so wicked as to refuse them? This renders our case deplorable and wretched in the extreme.

* Mal. i. 8.

We are by nature averse to that holy and spiritual obedience which is enjoined; and yet from our obligations to this obedience we cannot be released. Such is our moral inability, as to preclude all hope of our keeping the commandments of God to their full extent: and if we violate them at all, the foundation of self-righteousness is destroyed; so that, though we may still urge our good intentions, our repentance, and amendment, this is only like the repairing of a shattered building, which has no basis to support it, and which will therefore soon fall in ruins about us. At length be willing to abandon your false and dangerous confidence, and inquire, whether “that which the law cannot do, in that it is weak through the flesh *,” may not be effected for you by some other expedient.

Such an expedient the Gospel proposes. It is no other than the appointment of Jesus Christ to stand in our place, and God’s gracious acceptance of his obedience on our behalf; “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us †;”—not in us personally, but only as we are considered in Him, who is permitted to appear as our representative, to answer and to act for us. Nothing is more clearly declared in the sacred writings, than that believers are interested in all that he did, and all that he endured upon earth. In his

* Rom. viii. 3.

† Rom. viii. 4.

obedience then, of which we now speak, we include both his life and death. Doubtless both were necessary, and both had their effect, though in different ways, towards completing the great work of redemption. We presume not to assign all the reasons for either, but we may perceive a suitableness and propriety in them. However the justice of the law, in the tremendous penalty which it denounces, may be vindicated by the subjection of the Son of God in “being made a curse for us *,” yet the equity and the excellency of the precepts are most clearly seen, and displayed with peculiar lustre, in his cheerful and perfect compliance with them. And though by his suffering forgiveness of sin be obtained for us, yet something more is requisite for our full salvation, as the scriptures speak, “unto justification of life †.” If released from condemnation, we have still no claim to any reward. We may plead the death of Christ in arrest of judgment, and be rescued from punishment, but we have not on that ground any title to the divine favour, any right to the happiness of heaven. He therefore undertook to perform for us such a righteousness, as would be sufficient to answer these purposes, such as might render it consistent with the holy character of God and the honour of his government to receive us, as the objects of his love, to eternal life and glory.

* Gal. iii. 13.

† Rom. v. 18.

There is a clear and obvious distinction between the active and passive obedience of Christ ; and each may properly be considered apart from the other. Yet neither of them ought to be conceived as existing separately in Him ; nor can we suppose that any participate the advantages of the one, without participating those of the other also. We now inquire chiefly what was the nature and efficacy of his active obedience ; but not exclusively, as if his sufferings were to be disregarded. He was “ made under the law,” and his whole life was an act of perfect conformity to it, and therefore adequate to its demands. A defect in any one particular would have entirely frustrated the design. But he “ fulfilled all righteousness,” and yielded a subjection universal, perpetual, and persevering. This we call his merit.

The doctrine of human merit, of which so much has been said, is absurd in the extreme. It seems to imply that man may do more than his duty at some times, which will compensate for heinous neglects in other instances. This, upon the first view of the subject, may be pronounced impossible. Man lies under a twofold incapacity to merit any thing from his God ; first, because in no circumstances whatever can he perform more than he ought, the utmost exertion of all his faculties for the honour and service of God being invariably required of him ; and, secondly, because having once been a transgressor he can afterwards

deserve nothing but punishment. But the obedience of the Saviour was not due from him on his own account ; for our sakes he voluntarily became subject to the law, and laid himself under those obligations, which otherwise would not have been binding upon him. For us therefore, not for himself, he has merited.

We pretend not to calculate the greatness of this merit : but suggest only, that, as its value must be estimated in proportion to his original dignity and glory, it can admit of no defect ; it transcends our most enlarged conceptions. It is “ the Righteousness of God ;” so called, as being supremely excellent, or of divine appointment, but chiefly as being the Righteousness of Him, who is “ Lord of all.” Of this the Father declares his entire approbation, and his readiness on account of it to receive every returning sinner to his favour. It displays the holiness of his nature and his government, even in the exercise of mercy, and thus lays a firm foundation for our hope. This is the Righteousness, through which it was designed “ that grace might reign unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord *.” This is “ the merit,” for which alone, “ and not for our own works or deservings,” the Church of England maintains, “ we are accounted righteous before God †.” The necessity of this obedience on the

* Rom. v. 21.

† Article xi.

part of our Surety, for the vindication of God's justice and holiness in our acceptance, is also well argued in the Homily upon man's Salvation, which asserts,—that “ Christ for us fulfilled the law in his life,” as well as “ paid our ransom for us by his death :” “ so that now in him and by him every true Christian man may be called a fulfiller of the law, forasmuch as that which their infirmity lacked, Christ's justice (or righteousness) hath fulfilled,”

These clear and unequivocal declarations of the Church involve in them the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to all true believers. For what else do we mean, by saying it is “ imputed” to them, but that it is put down to their account, that it is reckoned as their's, and that they are therefore in God's estimation considered, and dealt with by Him, as perfectly righteous, that is, as if they had personally rendered that obedience to the law, which their Saviour did? We dispute not about words, nor do we contend for every fanciful explanation which has been given of the matter ; but this appears a plain and simple account. We have referred to the sentiments of the Church, not as containing a decisive proof of the doctrine, but under the idea that her authority should at least silence the objections of her professed members. However, for the conviction of all, who receive the Bible as the word of God, let us make our appeal to this

infallible test: and, though some may sneer and scoff at the representation, as contrary to their ideas of sound wisdom and rationality, let us judge for ourselves whether it be not scriptural.

Both Prophets and Apostles concur in their testimony of the Redeemer's character, and of the benefits to be derived from his mediatorial offices. Of him Isaiah teaches us to say, "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness;" and subjoins that reason, which evidently confines the words to our interpretation, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory *."—Jeremiah foretold, that he should be raised up in David's family as "a righteous Branch," and adds, "This is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS †." Let us contemplate this high and honourable appellation; for, it should seem, it is the title, by which in a peculiar manner it was intended that he should be made known and celebrated in his Church, the title which above all others endears him to real Christians. He is THE LORD; a decisive proof of his Deity, for this is the incommunicable name of JEHOVAH, and yet it is applied to Jesus. He is also OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS; from which we conclude, not merely that he is righteous in himself, or sanctifies us by his grace (though both are true, yet neither of these senses at all comes up to the

* Isa. xlv. 24, 25.

† Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

full import of the expression), but that he provides that righteousness, which his Father will accept and consider as the righteousness of them who are united to him by faith. If this be a fair explanation (and does it not appear obvious and unsophisticated ?) it determines the question before us.

Let us hear the great Apostle of the Gentiles, for in all his epistles he will be found a strenuous supporter of the doctrine. He declares, "The righteousness of God, which is manifested without the law, is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe *." This cannot be understood of their personal holiness, for it is "without the law," and is perfectly unconnected with their obedience to it : it is that which God himself provides, by his own gracious act reckons to their account, and as it were puts upon them, that therein they may appear with confidence before him. It is the same Righteousness which was imputed to Abraham, when he himself had nothing of his own "whereof to glory before God:" and we are assured that it shall be imputed to us also, upon our believing †. A comparison is instituted between Adam and the Saviour : from the first man's transgression we inherit guilt and condemnation, from the obedience of the second man we receive "the free

* Rom. iii. 21, 22.

† Rom. iv.

gift unto justification of life *.” But take away the doctrine we contend for, and the similitude fails: the whole representation of the apostle becomes not only flat and uninteresting, but absurd and inconsistent.

This method of salvation by the merit of another, which is so gracious an appointment on God’s part, and so exactly suited to our miserable case, is yet offensive to the pride of man, and has ever been so, because it robs him of his own boasted excellence. Thus we are assured it was opposed by the ancient, as it is now by the modern, Pharisees. “They being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” Let us beware, lest the same spirit of self-dependence produce the same effect in ourselves! Is it inquired, What is that righteousness, which they understood not, and were unwilling to stoop to? St. Paul informs us in the verse immediately subjoined, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth †.” The divine law received its full completion in Christ: this is now proposed to the acceptance of all, who will come to him by faith, and it constitutes the ground of their justification.

The Corinthians are instructed by the same

* Rom. v. 12—19.

† Rom. x. 3, 4.

inspired writer, that, while God determined “that no flesh should glory in His presence,” He hath graciously given us in his Son what we cannot have in ourselves, and that “Christ Jesus is made of God unto us Righteousness,” as well as “sanctification*.” Whether we understand or appreciate this wonderful appointment or not, the grace and glory of God are displayed by it, and salvation is brought unto us. Thus then we may exult with the apostle, “He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him †.”

To the Philippians also he declares his firm determination to renounce all reliance upon his own obedience and attainments, and his fervent desire and expectation to stand complete before God, as considered only in his Saviour: “That I may win Christ,” said he, “and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith ‡.” These are clear and incontrovertible testimonies, that St. Paul looked for eternal life as procured for him by the merit of his Lord and Master, and that he taught men every where to cherish the same hopes. We need not fear to follow such an example, or to adopt his expressions, however unfashionable they may now be,

* 1 Cor. 1. 29, 30. † 2 Cor. v. 21. ‡ Phil. iii. 8, 9.

in laying down or explaining our system of faith.

This righteousness of the Saviour, so requisite for our admission into heaven, is frequently represented in the scriptures, and commended to our regard, under the metaphor of a garment, the uses of which are obvious. It is the covering, which will conceal our defilement : it is that rich and costly dress which will adorn and beautify the soul : it is that precious robe, which will be considered as the ensign of dignity and honour. We are exhorted to accept it, to put it on, and exult in it. “ I counsel thee,” says Christ, to “ buy of me white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear*.” Those therefore, who have “ put on Christ,” shall stand with distinguished glory before the throne of God † ; and they may now sing with triumphant joy, “ I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God ; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels ‡.”

From the scripture quotations, which we have given, it appears that righteousness is imputed to them only that believe. It will be the subject of

* Rev. iii. 18. † Rev. vii. 9. ‡ Isa. lxi. 10.

a subsequent essay, to consider more at large how they receive the blessing. But for the present we remark, that faith itself, to which so much efficacy is ascribed, does not include in it any thing meritorious. It is a disposition most pleasing to God, as being the work of his Spirit, and as putting an honour upon Christ, more than any other principle in the mind. But it cannot share any part of the Saviour's glory; and therefore we should beware of placing any measure of our dependence upon it. For faith, however excellent, is not a fulfilling of the law, and cannot constitute in any degree the ground of our hope. Its very nature and office is to renounce all merit, and to direct our whole attention to the Lord Christ. To conclude,

1. Let us guard this doctrine against abuses. Man is ever prone to pervert what is good to the most mischievous purposes. But we must not therefore give up the truth of God, because "men of corrupt minds" have turned it to a bad account. Let us watch and pray, that we may "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." We have here exhibited only an imperfect view of the subject; from which no one ought to take up an objection. Let the system of our religion be further opened, and the character of those who embrace it be fully described. Then we trust it will be acknowledged, that it has no licentious tendency, but the reverse. From

what we have already seen, we shall not surely be induced to disregard the law, because our Lord has “magnified it and made it honourable:” nor shall we feel ourselves under less obligations to love and serve him on account of his boundless grace. O may we live under the influence of a holy gratitude for his benefits, and be fired by a pure zeal for his name!

2. Let us apply the doctrine for spiritual consolation. It is peculiarly calculated to give relief to the mind, when oppressed with a sense of guilt, and pained with a consciousness of extreme depravity. If the awakened penitent can be persuaded to rely upon “the righteousness of our God and Saviour,” he will lose all his terrors: and nothing else can preserve the serenity of the most advanced Christian, whose attainments will always appear so defective as to shake his confidence, whenever his whole reliance is not placed on “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” While therefore we guard against the abuse of our principles, let us endeavour to enter into their meaning and feel their full influence. So shall we be established in hope and peace, even when covered with shame and confusion under the view of our exceeding baseness. We shall be furnished with a plea, which we may urge, and which will surely prevail with our God, in life, in death, and at the day of judgment. What a source of joy is this!

3. Let not the careless and ungodly derive any

comfort from the subject before us. To such persons we would say, Not having felt any painful sense of your own guilt and condemnation, you cannot “ have submitted yourselves unto the righteousness of God.” It is offered to your acceptance by the ministry of the gospel, but you pour contempt upon it by your refusal : and your rejection of this gracious provision aggravates your sin, as it will surely do your final destruction. With such dispositions as you manifest, it is not possible that you can be partakers of “ this great salvation.” It would have filled your heart with gratitude and joy ; and you would have cried out, with holy admiration of your Redeemer, “ My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day : for I know not the numbers thereof*.” But, destitute as you now are of every thing which can recommend you to the favour, or entitle you to the kingdom, of God, O how will you appear ! “ He will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet : and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place : and your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand †.”

* Psalm lxxi. 15.

† Isa. xxviii. 17, 18.

ESSAY XXVIII.

ON THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST.

PART I.

The sufferings and death of Christ much insisted on:—their nature and design. The general dread of God shews a conviction of the necessity of some propitiation. That Jesus Christ made a real and efficacious atonement by his blood, appears from the ancient types and figures,—from express declarations of scripture,—from every part of practical Christianity,—and from the worship of heaven.

THE Saviour of the world is the grand object exhibited in the holy scriptures. His original glory, his mediatorial character and offices, his humiliation, obedience, and sufferings, both in his life and death; these are the interesting and momentous subjects, which we are called on to contemplate with lively faith and devout admiration. Every part of the great work, which he undertook to execute, we may conclude to be important and necessary; but his death, including all its concomitant circumstances, is chiefly insisted on, and, as it should seem, for two rea-

sons. 1. It was an act of most meritorious obedience, and perfected that righteousness, which he fulfilled for us. Accordingly, the same effect, the procuring of our justification, is attributed to his blood as well as to his obedience*. And, 2. It was an act of solemn expiation, for the removal of our guilt. That it was intended so to be, and that such is its operation, we shall endeavour to prove in the present essay.

It is not possible to describe the variety and magnitude of the sufferings of Christ; but we may remark their peculiar nature. They did not happen to him by surprise, or, as we speak, accidentally. They were all foreseen, they entered into his original plan, and he came into the world on purpose to submit to them. If, therefore, we would investigate the reason, we must look further than the malice of the Jews, the injustice of the Roman judge, or even the temptations of Satan. We must ask, What was his design; or what the object to be accomplished? Doubtless there must have been an adequate cause for a transaction of all others the most amazing, the offering of himself upon the cross; and he has not left us to dark or uncertain conjectures about it. If we attend to the scripture representation, with an humble and serious mind, unbiassed by the subtle and perverse disputings

* Rom. v. 9, 19.

of philosophy, falsely so called, we shall perceive a peculiar beauty and excellence in the plan.

Under an awful impression of God's righteous character, and of our own impurity and guilt, who amongst us can forbear crying out with solicitude and anguish of mind, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God *?" If I could from this moment live in perfect conformity to the rule of rectitude, or if a complete righteousness, with respect to the future, should be imputed to me; yet have I nothing to dread on account of past offences? Will not God require either punishment or compensation? Does not his law declare, "The wages of sin is death †?" And how shall that sentence be cancelled? Or, if cancelled, how will the Lord manifest his abhorrence of sin, and maintain the honour of his government?

Such inquiries as these will probably rise in the breast of every man, whose conscience is awakened to a proper sense of his condition. Most persons, who think seriously, seem to be aware of the necessity of some expedient or other to propitiate an offended Deity, and to effect a reconciliation. And from this conviction, perhaps, originates that dread of God, which is so generally prevalent, that we may almost account it natural. The greatest part of the heathen

* Mic. vi. 6.

† Rom. vi. 23.

world discovered it; they felt the evil, though they saw not the true remedy. Throughout their various systems of religion, mixed and disgraced as they were with superstition, folly, and wickedness, they plainly shewed that in their views an atonement for sin was most desirable and absolutely requisite. It has been argued, indeed, that their sacrifices were derived from the customs of the ancient Patriarchs: and, if so, they may be traced up to a divine revelation, which, as we shall see, fully establishes the point in hand. But we surely, with clearer discoveries of the perfections of God, and of our own numerous and shameful deviations from the rule of duty, must be more deeply convinced than the Heathens were of the necessity of some valuable oblation, in order to avert impending wrath.

The scriptures inform us what kind of an oblation it may be proper and consistent for a just and holy God to accept, if he remit the punishment we have deserved; and how utterly insufficient for the expiation of guilt were all the expedients of man's contrivance, or even the most costly sacrifices under the Patriarchal or Mosaic dispensations *. They do more, they assure us that Jesus Christ is the very offering, which will answer every purpose both on God's part and

* Psal. l. 9. li. 16. Mic. vi. 6. Heb. x. 4.

our's, and that "He hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*."

This is the doctrine which we maintain, not only as true, but as essential to the system of the gospel. As it is not the design of these essays to enter into subtle disquisitions or speculative debates, it may suffice to give a plain statement of the question before us. We understand, then, that we are redeemed to God by the blood of Christ in such a sense, that his death is to be considered as a real and efficacious atonement for our offences; in other words, this is the consideration, which God, as a righteous governor, requires of our Mediator; and on account of it he averts from us the punishment we have deserved, and proposes to receive us to his favour. It is called "a propitiation," because in this way only he is conciliated or appears propitious towards us. It is sometimes also termed "a Satisfaction," because it so completely answers the ends of his government, that all the claims of his justice for our offences may now be entirely renounced.

Yet by these and similar expressions we mean not that the agonies and excruciating tortures of the Son of God were of themselves pleasing to the Father, but only for the effect produced by them, and the manifestation thereby made of his

* Heb. ix. 26.

own glorious character. He had no vindictive disposition to be gratified, and therefore he could not be delighted by the sufferings of Christ dying for us, as a revengeful person is by the destruction or distress of an enemy. But “the Lord is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake; He will magnify the law and make it honourable*.” It would also be a strange perversion of the doctrine to imagine, that he is so propitiated as a wrathful man is appeased; or that he was of himself unwilling to pardon sinners till Christ undertook our cause, and that now he is constrained to shew mercy. The mediation of the Son, and all the rich benefits resulting from it, must be ascribed to the Father’s free and unsolicited love towards us, of which they were the fruit and expression. In this way he can exercise grace most honourably to himself; and therefore only through this wonderful expedient, “the just suffering for the unjust †,” redemption is obtained for us.

This is a point of great moment, and as “we should earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints ‡,” it may be proper to urge some strong arguments from scripture in its support.

1. The doctrine of an atonement for sin appears from the types and figures in the old testa-

* Isa. xlii. 21.

† 1 Pet. iii. 18.

‡ Jude 3.

ment. Indeed it has been expressed or implied in all the various revelations, and has actually made a part of every religion, which received its origin from heaven. It is highly probable, that our first parents sacrificed those animals, with the skins of which they were clothed, and that they did it by divine appointment. We presume they were instructed by that external emblem to represent the great expiation of the cross, to which they were taught to look forward, as the ground of all their hopes towards God*. Hence the custom was established, and continued from age to age among all the true worshippers of Jehovah. And to this origin also we are inclined to ascribe the general notion, which has prevailed through the heathen world, of propitiating an offended Deity by the blood of beasts. The idea does not seem to be suggested by reason: for what could have led to it? Does there appear to be any such value in these oblations, that they can be conceived in any wise to repair the honour of God's violated law, and compensate for sin? But all seems natural and consistent, if we admit that it was God's design to reconcile the world to himself "by the death of his Son," and by the institution of sacrifices, in which an animal is exhibited as suffering for an offender, to "set forth Christ as a propitiation through faith in his blood."

* Gen. iii. 21.

“ Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof: and the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering*.” The reason is assigned, why the dying lamb was acceptable: “ Abel offered it BY FAITH †.” This proves that the appointment was from heaven: for otherwise on what was his faith founded?

“ Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour ‡.” But we conceive that the taking away of the life of these animals, and the consuming of their bodies by fire, could not be an act of itself pleasing to God, and that it became so only as it was done in obedience to his command, and had an immediate reference to Him, “ who hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour §.”

Abraham also manifested his faith, and received the tokens of divine approbation, while he approached to God with similar sacrifices. He seems to have been favoured with clear discoveries of the suffering Redeemer, for “ he saw his day;” and when “ he took the knife to slay his son,” and in fact “ offered up Isaac,” he exhibited a striking resemblance of that more wonderful

* Gen. iv. 4.

† Heb. xi. 4.

‡ Gen. viii. 20, 21.

§ Eph. v. 2.

transaction on mount Calvary, in which Jehovah himself “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all*.”

The gospel was preached to the Israelites in the whole of the Mosaic ritual; and the sufferings of the Son of God as an atonement for sin were continually held up to their view by visible and most affecting emblems. That many of their nation did not understand the spiritual meaning of their own religious services, is no objection to this interpretation. Our Lord argued, that they ought so to have understood them, as to expect that he should die in perfect conformity to their types and for the completion of their scriptures†. The chief point of resemblance between the type and the antitype must be that which we insist on: for the procuring of pardon by the substitution of a sacrifice, instead or in the place of an offender, that is, by vicarious sufferings, was the prominent feature in their figurative dispensation.

In that tremendous night, when the angel of the Lord went forth to smite all the first-born of the Egyptians, the houses of the Israelites were spared; but they were taught to ascribe their deliverance to the blood of the paschal lamb, which, being sprinkled upon their door-posts, was the appointed token of security‡. And,

* Gen. xxii. 10. John viii. 56. Heb. xi. 17. Rom. viii. 32.

† Luke xxiv. 26, 27, 45, 46.

‡ Exodus xii. 13.

with the new testament in our hands, shall we doubt whether expiation for our guilt be made, and our salvation obtained, in a similar way, by “the blood of sprinkling,” when we are assured, that “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us *?” Or can any language more fitly describe the doctrine of atonement?

Offenders against the ceremonial law were in most cases allowed to bring a sin-offering from their flocks or herds, and by the solemn sacrifice of an animal, upon which they laid their hands, and which was accordingly considered as bearing their iniquities and dying in their place, they were delivered from punishment.—On the great day of expiation, which was observed every year, the people were taught, by plain and lively emblems, that as guilty creatures they could have no access to God but through the intercession of an High-priest and by atoning blood †. It is beyond a doubt, that the intention of those services was to lead them to the knowledge of the Saviour, and in particular to preach to them the doctrine we are now maintaining. Every day indeed the same instructive representation was given, by “the continual burnt-offering of a lamb without spot,” both morning and evening ‡.

* 1 Cor. v. 7. Heb. xi. 28. xii. 24.

† Lev. xvi. compared with Heb. ix. and x.

‡ Numb. xxviii. 3—8.

Nor can we be at a loss for the proper explanation of these figures, when we see John the Baptist pointing out our Lord as the end and completion of them: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*!" The meaning must be, that Jesus was to be offered, as a lamb in sacrifice, for the removal of our guilt: "For as much as ye know that we were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot†."

If we reject this evangelical interpretation of the Jewish ritual, the whole must appear burdensome and absurd in the extreme. But if it be allowed to prefigure the Messiah and the only method of forgiveness, we perceive in it a wonderful excellence and importance. It is adorned and dignified by the doctrine of atonement. "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission‡." The repetition of their sacrifices, however they might avail for the removal of ceremonial uncleanness, proved them to be inefficacious and inadequate for the great purpose of expiating moral guilt, or purging the conscience in the sight of God. This, we are assured, cannot be accomplished but by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ once for all.

* John i. 29.

† 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

‡ Heb. ix. 22.

2. The doctrine of atonement is conveyed to us in terms the most explicit, and in numerous passages of the word of God. It is not contended by its opposers, that the notion would not naturally offer itself to common readers; they assert only, that it was not designed. But as the scriptures were given for the instruction of the plainest persons, there is sufficient reason to suspect and even to reject that explanation, not of some obscure texts, but of the sacred writings in general, which we should not discover or think of without the assistance of a philosophical genius or the acuteness of a subtle commentator. We shall be in no danger from taking the obvious sense, especially when that is suggested, as in the case before us, by declarations continually repeated.

Concerning our Redeemer it is said, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.—It pleased the Lord to bruise him; He hath put him to grief; His soul shall make an offering for sin.—He shall bear their iniquities*." Now, what conclusion shall we draw from such assertions, but that Jesus undertook to expiate our guilt, that all his sufferings

* Isa. liii. 5, 6, 10, 11.

were inflicted by his righteous Father upon him as our substitute, our vicarious sacrifice, and that only by the excruciating pains of his cross and passion our pardon is procured? This is what we understand by the Atonement.

The same ideas are suggested, while we read, that “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself,—to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness*.” Thus saith “the Lord of hosts,” declaring his purpose concerning the violent death of his beloved Son, “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow;” and we are assured that by this expedient “a fountain shall be opened for sin and for uncleanness †.”

Our Lord could not with propriety speak very openly and explicitly of the atonement which he intended to make by the sacrifice of himself, before the event took place; but on certain occasions he did fully declare it. “The Son of man,” said he, “came to give his life a ransom for many.”—“I will give my flesh for the life of the world.” “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins ‡.” These are unequivocal assertions, and the doc-

* Dan. ix. 24, 26. † Zech. xiii. 1, 7. Matt. xxvi. 31.

‡ Matt. xx. 28. xxvi. 28. John vi. 51, 53.

trine we are maintaining gives the only fair and consistent explanation.

The apostolical writings are, as we might expect, still more clear and copious upon this subject. The great preacher of the Gentiles avows his determination to know nothing, in the exercise of his ministry, save Christ crucified, and to glory in nothing but the cross*. He exults in the thought that "Christ died for the ungodly," and that "we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son †." On this ground he calls on believers to give thanks, that they "have redemption in him through his blood," inasmuch as he "has made peace through the blood of his cross ‡," and charges them to remember their obligations to Him, who has "bought them with a price §." All this is clear and consistent on the supposition that Jesus has offered himself as a propitiatory sacrifice for us ; but, if this be rejected, the language is strange and unintelligible, and the exhortations lose all their force and importance. Which of these interpretations is the most honourable to the inspired writings ?

The epistle to the Hebrews is full to the point, and of all the holy scriptures is most decisive. The grand purport of it seems, 1. to shew the evangelical meaning of the Jewish ceremonies. In order to this it is proved, that the legal sacri-

* 1 Cor. ii. 2. Gal. vi. 14.

† Rom. v. 6, 10.

‡ Col. i. 14, 20.

§ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

fices not only bore some reference to Christ, but were intended to be models of him ; which they cannot be, except by his death he has made an atonement. And its design is, 2. to describe the Redeemer in the character of a Priest, exhibited, though imperfectly, by the sons of Aaron. But it is manifest that he cannot be a priest at all, or in any proper sense execute the office, if he have no sacrifice to present. “ For every high-priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer:” and we are accordingly assured, in language too plain to be misunderstood, that “ now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself *.”

3. The proof of the doctrine rests not on detached texts or passages of scripture : it is implied in every part of practical and experimental Christianity, and gives to the whole system its principal life and vigour. If this be indeed the case, as we maintain, it furnishes an argument of all others the strongest and most incontestable. Let us consider, then, what influence the belief of the Saviour’s atonement produces, by which we shall see what mischievous effects must follow from an utter exclusion of it out of the scheme of the Gospel.

It is this which in a peculiar manner arrests

* Heb. viii. 3. ix. 26.

the attention of the careless sinner, softens the hard heart, and constrains the penitent to weep with unfeigned contrition. Nothing else can cause such genuine sorrow. It is therefore foretold, "They shall look upon Him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him*."

It is the view of Christ dying as a sacrifice for sin, which raises the trembling penitent from the dust, and encourages him to rejoice in hope. He seems to hear the expiring Saviour say, "Look unto me, and be saved," and then his fears are dispersed. At least, he ventures to make application to God for mercy in dependence on that faithful saying, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners †."

In approaching to the throne of grace, if he can present his supplications with any boldness, or expect a favourable audience, it is simply and entirely because he can urge so powerful a plea, "Jesus Christ the righteous is the propitiation for our sins ‡." But if you take away this ground of confidence, how shall any of us presume to draw near to our offended God? Or "who shall entreat for us?"

The established Christian lives in the habit of a continual and most affectionate regard to Christ as dying for him; and thus only can he make any progress, or even maintain his profes-

* Zech. xii. 10. John xix. 37. † 1 Tim. i. 15.

‡ 1 John ii. 1, 2.

sion. He will say therefore, “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me *.” I am daily contracting fresh guilt and pollution, but “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth me from all sin †.”

From the sacrifice of the cross he derives his strongest motives for holy obedience, and for vigorous exertions in the service of his Lord. This inspires him with cheerful diligence and fervent zeal, from a sense of his immense obligations. For thus he will argue, when he is fixed in devout contemplation on mount Calvary, “I am not my own; I will therefore glorify him, who hath bought me with his blood.—The love of Christ constrains me: and I can no longer live unto myself, but unto him who died for me ‡.”—Is there any other principle equally efficacious?

The Christian rises superior to all the temptations which can be offered to him. But for this strength and elevation of mind he is indebted to those views of his dying Lord, which faith in his sacrifice supplies. With the cross in his eye, he mounts up as on eagles’ wings, and can sing with the apostle, “By this the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” “And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus

* Gal. ii. 20. † 1 John i. 7.

‡ 1 Cor. vi. 19. 2 Cor. v. 14.

Christ, by whom we have now received THE ATONEMENT*.”

If we accompany the servant of God to the close of life, then more especially will the influence of his religious principles be felt and manifested. If he be favoured with understanding and sufficient strength, he will express his confidence and joy, not in his own righteousness, but in the propitiation made for him, and cry with devout exultation, “Thanks be to God, which giveth me the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ †.” But if you could rob him of this hope he would lie down in despair, and say, “My faith is vain:—I am yet in my sins.”

We see then that the atonement enters into the whole of our religion, and constitutes its very essence. It is one at least of the vital parts; and all that is of importance in Christianity, or conducive to peace or holiness, must be totally renounced, if this be given up.—We add briefly,

4. The doctrine is manifestly proved by the worship of heaven. In that bright world, where the vail of ignorance and unbelief is taken away, the plan of our redemption by Jesus Christ is best understood. Saints and angels there unite in contemplating the great mystery, and in celebrating with rapturous praises the abundant grace which is displayed in it. The view of Christ, as

* Gal. vi. 14. Rom. v. 11. † 1 Cor. xv. 57.

having made atonement for sin by his one oblation upon the cross, excites their admiration, and calls forth their songs. He is seated on the throne, but even there appears as a Lamb that had been slain; and to Him in that character this grateful acknowledgment is made by his people, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God BY THY BLOOD." With these also an innumerable company of angels is joined, and ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, cry with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing *."

In their sublime anthems, it is evident that the sacrifice of the Son of God forms the principal subject. If that doctrine be removed, the chief cause of wonder and praise to the blessed in heaven is taken away; and their songs will be deprived of all their animation, or rather they will become perfectly unintelligible: some other reason must be assigned for our salvation, and not "the blood of the Lamb."—The conclusion then is obvious; the atonement is "the pillar and ground of the truth:" on this the whole fabric of Christianity is built, and with it must stand or fall. O that all the church below may thus cordially unite with that above,

* Rev. v. 6, 9, 11, 12.

“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever *.”
Amen.

* Rev. i. 5, 6.

ESSAY XXIX.

ON THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST.

PART II.

The death of Christ, though generally disregarded by men, the object of God's counsels,—held forth to our view as the appointed atonement,—in all the scriptures,—in the ministry of the Gospel,—in the Lord's Supper,—admired and rejoiced in by believers,—as a proof and instance of the love of God,—a manifestation of his righteous character,—vindicating the authority and excellence of his law,—confirming our hopes. Yet objected to,—as contrary to reason,—as dishonourable to the divine character,—as hostile to morality.

IT is a consideration truly deplorable, that the object which of all others is most valuable in the estimation of Heaven, is very lightly regarded upon earth. The cross of Christ brings glory to God, excites wonder and praise among the blessed angels, and is the constant source of peace and joy to real Christians. Yet few among us understand its excellency, or even its meaning: it is despised by men, whose salvation depends upon

it. The subject is now before us, and it will be unpardonable to treat it with indifference. Let us endeavour so to contemplate the Redeemer, "bearing our sins in his own body on the tree," that the view may affect our hearts, and draw forth the liveliest affections of gratitude and love to him.

We have been inquiring into the nature of his death, its causes, and efficacy. From the arguments adduced we have concluded it to be a proper and adequate atonement for sin; and this sentiment we have defended as a doctrine most important and essential to the Christian system. So much stress is laid upon the cross of Christ, and such extensive advantages are ascribed to it, that it seems expedient to resume the consideration. It should seem to be the design of God to direct our most serious attention to it; and it is that, which, as it is best calculated, is also most powerful, to conciliate the cordial regard of mankind towards Jesus Christ. Thus he foretold, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me *."

This amazing transaction, which is so continually held up to our view, did not happen accidentally, as we have already suggested: it formed a part of "the everlasting covenant," and therefore was necessary for the completion of the

* John xii. 32.

wondrous plan. Jesus was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,” when “by wicked hands he was crucified and slain;” and his most malignant enemies accomplished only “whatsoever the hand and the counsel of the Lord determined before to be done*.” That which was thus ordered by the divine wisdom, “before the foundation of the world,” having been carried into effect, we are called upon to contemplate, believe, and admire. Christ is now “SET FORTH,” or exhibited to our view by representations the most striking, “as a propitiation through faith in his blood†.”

The sacred writers evidently insist upon this more frequently and with greater energy than upon any other subject. They seem solicitous to display the sufferings of the Saviour, and commend him to our regard, chiefly as “bearing our iniquities‡.” It is therefore surprising, that any persons, who are in the habit of perusing the scriptures, should deny or overlook the doctrine, to which they all point as to a centre.

It is also the will and the command of God, that this object should be held up to public notice and admiration by the ministry of the Gospel. The servants of Christ, who bring the glad tidings of salvation, announce “REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD§.” It is their principal business to

* Acts ii. 23. iv. 28.

† Rom. iii. 25,

‡ Isaiah liii. 11.

§ Eph. i. 7.

do so ; though they have other considerations to offer to their hearers, yet the sacrifice of the cross is so important and essential a part of their system, that they must keep it continually in sight, and adopt the exhortation of the Baptist, as a general direction to all inquirers, “ Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world *.” Thus it was with the apostles of our Lord, who with united testimony declared, as if there were no other point of sufficient moment to be attended to, “ We preach Christ crucified †.” Nor can any succeeding minister be said to follow their example, or even to teach the religion of the Bible, if this subject do not constitute the substance of his public addresses. Is it not equally proper and requisite, as in primitive times, that every labourer in the spiritual vineyard should be able to say, “ I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified ‡ ?” And, “ I delivered unto you FIRST OF ALL that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures § ?” This would render the divine ordinance of preaching, what it was intended to be, lively and efficacious : and to every Christian church, as well as to that in Galatia, it might be said, with respect to the striking representation of the atonement in all their public ministrations, “ Before

* John i. 29.

† 1 Cor. i. 23.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 2.

§ 1 Cor. xv. 3.

your eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you *.” But how can this description apply to those places where the death of Christ, as our sole propitiatory sacrifice, is either concealed from the view, or but seldom glanced at ?

The continual celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's supper was also a wise and gracious appointment, intended doubtless to maintain and perpetuate a serious regard to this doctrine throughout the whole Christian world. It has very much contributed to this effect, and is admirably adapted to the purpose. It exhibits even to the bodily eye, by emblems the most significant, the atonement made upon the cross ; and every communicant virtually declares his need of this atonement, and his grateful acceptance of it. The action itself is uninteresting, or rather perfectly unmeaning, on any other supposition. “ This is my body, which is broken for you,” said the Saviour, while he divided the bread ; and then taking the cup, he added, “ This is my blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Thus we are required to “ shew the Lord's death, till He come †.” We commemorate that event, not as a mere mournful transaction, or as the departure of a generous benefactor, but as the meritorious oblation, the consideration

* Gal. iii. 1. † Matt. xxvi. 26—28. 1 Cor. xi. 23—26.

made to divine justice, by which alone forgiveness is obtained for us. The participation of the outward elements is not in itself an expiatory sacrifice; nor is it therefore to be depended on, as if by our appearance at the Lord's table we could balance accounts with him, or atone for any one transgression. Our great business in that ordinance is to renounce all self-confidence, and to plead with our offended God the propitiation made by his Son Jesus Christ. And, "if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy sacrament, then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood *." The whole is consistent, solemn, and interesting, if we consider this religious service as a feast upon a sacrifice; but if no real sacrifice has been made by the death of Christ, we are at a loss to account for these descriptions, and can assign no good reason for the institution itself.

How highly becoming is it, then, that what the Lord God hath so honoured, as to exhibit in his word and ordinances above all other objects for our devout admiration, should be continually regarded by the true Christian with warmest affections! This he should contemplate, not in the way of cold speculation, but with wonder, gratitude, and joy. This is it, which will engage his thoughts and animate his heart, not merely

* Communion Service. John vi. 53.

during the season of public worship; but at all times and places, as far as possible, he will desire and endeavour so to be “looking unto Jesus,” as to obtain a believing view of “the Lamb that was slain:” and under the full influence of that view, he will say with an apostle, “I am crucified with Christ*.”

Since such a value is put upon the atonement, and such benefits result from it, we may with propriety and confidence commend it to general notice and esteem. This may be done, while we proceed to remark more distinctly some of the grand purposes which it was intended to answer. The propitiation of the cross is manifestly exhibited

1. As the strongest proof and most illustrious instance of the love of God. It is, as we have represented, the effect of his own grace, unmerited and even unsolicited by us. Redemption by the blood of Christ is a display of richer mercy, than if an act of indemnity had been passed by the absolute sovereignty of God, if such an act had been possible or could have availed for our deliverance. We see and taste his goodness in the bounties of providence; but the gift of his beloved Son, more than all his other benefits united, demonstrates his kindness towards us. We have only to look at the cross, and be convinced that

* Gal. ii. 20.

“ God is love *.” The degree and extent of this love we pretend not to estimate, because the expression of it, in the sacrifice which he has provided, must exceed all calculation. “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life †.” Every other consideration of the divine goodness seems to be swallowed up in this ; “ Herein is love ! not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins ‡.” And hence we may argue, that there is nothing too great or valuable for us to expect at his hands. “ He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things § ?” Every thing else in comparison will be a trifle for him to bestow. O what returns of gratitude and affection are due from us ! “ Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift ||.” Consider it

2. As a manifestation of his righteous character. Should we view the Saviour expiring on the cross, and then hear the prophet’s description, “ It pleased the Lord to bruise him ¶ ;” what must be the impression produced ? Can we for a moment conceive, that the Father would so afflict his dear Son, merely to shew his regard for our sinful race, if his other attributes and the honour of

* 1 John iv. 8.

† John iii. 16.

‡ 1 John iv. 10.

§ Rom. viii. 32.

|| 2 Cor. ix. 15.

¶ Isa. liii. 10.

his government did not render the expedient requisite, in order to our deliverance? For if there had been no objections to the free exercise of mercy on those accounts, an act of indemnity might have served the purpose. But we are assured that it was one design of the atonement, to shew with what a just and holy God we have to do, and how great is his abhorrence of sin, lest offenders should take encouragement from its pardon to transgress the more:—"to declare his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*." Who are we, that we should presume to say, this consideration did not at all influence the divine conduct, that no reasons are or can be assigned for it, or that justice had nothing to do in the matter? According to the Socinians, the cup which the Saviour drank did not proceed from the Father, or he might have been excused from drinking it; both which seem contrary to his assertions†. That scheme is most unfavourable to the purposes of holiness; for according to its representation no proof or public display of God's displeasure against sin is necessary: from which the inference is obvious, that sin is not offensive to him. But by the doctrine of the atonement such a view is given us of its odiousness in the estimation of a holy God, that we are constrained to tremble on

* Rom. iii. 26. † Matt. xxvi. 39. John xviii. 11.

account of it, even while we receive a pardon from his hands. Consider it as intended also

3. For the vindication of the divine law. Every violated precept condemns the transgressor, be his circumstances whatever they may ; and the doom denounced is most tremendous. Now had the sentence been cancelled by a mere act of grace, without any propitiation made for us, it might have appeared, as if we had been laid under injunctions which were too strict ; and it might have been concluded, that the equity of the command could not be maintained, and that the condemnation is removed, as being cruel and unjust. Abhorred be such a blasphemous reproach ! The cross of Christ most effectually prevents or answers it. The authority and excellency of the law, even in its severest denunciations, must be acknowledged, while we see the eternal Son bowing himself in submission to its sentence. “ Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*.” Such is the appointed method of our deliverance ; and it is a method as glorious to God, as it is comfortable to us. In this view of the subject we cry out with the Apostle, “ Do we make void the law through faith ? God forbid : yea, we establish the law †.” For we represent the whole human race as under indispensable obli-

* Gal. iii. 13.

† Rom. iii. 31.

gations to obey it, and by its righteous penalty doomed to perish, except some one, both able and willing, undertake to suffer for us. Such is He, who hath interposed with his own blood, and died "THE JUST FOR THE UNJUST." The sight must inspire us with holy reverence and fear. But we forget not, that it was designed

4. For the confirmation of our hopes. It is not easy to administer comfort to those, who are deeply impressed with a sense of the demerit of sin, and have suitable conceptions of the divine purity. No wonder, if anguish and horror overwhelm them. The question will perpetually recur, "Who shall entreat for us?" Nor are the distressing apprehensions of the awakened penitent to be quieted by any other expedient, than the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Hereby the curse is removed, the honour of the violated law is repaired, the perfections of God in all their beauteous lustre are displayed, the covenant of grace is sealed, and every spiritual blessing secured to the believer, according to the promise and the oath of Jehovah. What can the most scrupulous or desponding desire? Will not this suffice for the removal of every doubt? Yes: "you, who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ*." Thousands can testify its efficacy in giving peace and confidence

* Eph. ii. 13.

to their minds; when they perceive, that by virtue of this sacrifice “mercy and truth are met together*,” and the exercise of the two is rendered perfectly consistent. It is the remedy, which restores health to the diseased soul: “By his stripes we are healed†.” “The blood of Christ shall purge your conscience from dead works‡” and, even after the foulest relapses, we are encouraged to renew our application to this “fountain, which is opened for sin and for uncleanness§.” “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins||.”

This doctrine, however, with which our peace is most essentially connected, is greatly opposed; and various misrepresentations of it are spread abroad. While it is considered as the peculiar glory of Christ in heaven, that he has “redeemed us to God by his blood,” his enemies on earth are endeavouring to rob him of this glory.

1. Some object to it, as being contrary to reason. Men, who are conceited of their own understanding, are unwilling to accede to any theological position, which is not level to their capacities. Mysteries in nature they readily admit, but in religion they reject them with disdain. They ask therefore, “How can these things be?”

* Psalm lxxxv. 10. † Isa. liii. 5. ‡ Heb. ix. 14.

§ Zech. xiii. 1. || 1 John ii. 1, 2.

Is it not most inconceivable, that he, “ who knew no sin, should be made sin for us ?” Now, though we should allow that this is an appointment which we cannot explain, it would be highly presumptuous for us to refuse our assent to it; because it is plainly declared. And if we are assured that this sacrifice alone will expiate our guilt, we should at least be silent, though we do not comprehend in what manner it produces the effect. Some little, as we have seen, is told us, and with that little we should be satisfied. We are informed, that though justice calls for the destruction of the sinner, yet by means of this propitiation God has so manifested his righteousness, that he can be “ just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.” We ask no further questions, but believe and adore.

Some indeed have urged, that the atonement derives all its efficacy from the divine designation. But this sentiment we consider as derogatory to the honour of Christ. It seems to imply, that his death is not of itself an oblation of any value, and that any other might have served the purpose. We presume not to limit the power of God, or to say, that he could not have redeemed us by a method different from that which he has chosen. But he himself has taught us, that “ it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins * :” there is an unsuitable-

* Heb. x. 4.

ness and incompetency in any such sacrifices for the attainment of the end proposed. But it is not so with respect to the one offering of the Son of God upon the cross; for we are told that this plan is honourable to God; it is that which “became Him*.” We consider it therefore as appointed on account of its fitness to illustrate and display his righteous character; and we ascribe the efficacy of the atonement to the infinite dignity and excellency of Him, “who gave himself for us.”

In this view of the doctrine, upon an appeal even to human reason, we may ask, Where is the absurdity? Though the innocent suffer instead of the guilty, yet no injury is done to the sufferer, who voluntarily and cheerfully undertook the work, knowing beforehand how much would be exacted of him. If likewise we are assured, by indubitable authority, that he was in every respect qualified to fulfil his engagements, and to satisfy the demand of divine justice in the expiation of our guilt, though we pretend not to calculate or settle the claim as if it were an account between a creditor and his debtors, who shall object? There is nothing in this accommodation, which contradicts any clear dictate of our reason. Instead of cavilling at the appointment, we shall see abundant cause, upon a full investigation, to admire its wisdom.

* Heb. ii. 10.

2. Others imagine that the doctrine militates against the character of God. It is said, that the view which it exhibits of him is forbidding and disgusting, representing him as cruel, vindictive, and inexorable. These objectors argue, that a kind and merciful God can require nothing but the reformation of his offending creatures, and that it is absurd to conceive of him as seeking their destruction, or as wreaking his vengeance on One in their stead. But we ask, where do they learn that God is ALL-MERCY, or that the attribute of justice can have no exercise? Sinners indeed who are exposed to punishment, may consider the character of a righteous judge as unamiable and frightful; but are we to give such a description of the Deity, as may suit their wishes and correspond with their vitiated principles and dispositions? This would be to rob him of his highest excellency, and degrade him from his dignity. Is it not also most evident, that the repentance of a criminal is not the only or the principal thing aimed at in judicial proceedings, and that, however he may be changed, the severest inflictions may still be necessary for the honour and security of the government? We have likewise remarked before, that it is a distorted account of the atonement, to represent the Father as actuated by a vindictive disposition in delivering up his Son to the death of the cross. Doubtless, that transaction displayed his justice ;

but it is impossible to conceive an instance of more enlarged benevolence or richer grace towards mankind: and therefore we maintain, that it gives us the most engaging and glorious view of his character. It exhibits a wonderful connexion and harmony between those attributes, which might otherwise have appeared in opposition or at variance with each other: "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other *."

Some have insinuated, that it is the most flagrant injustice to punish the innocent for the guilty. Now, though we understand not all the measures of divine government, we do not hesitate to say, that there can be no violation of equity in permitting One, who comes forward with the voluntary proposal, to suffer in the stead of another. But the objection may be retorted; and, if the fact be allowed, that Christ suffered though he did no sin, and suffered from the hand of God, as the scriptures declare, we may ask our opponents, What account do you give of it? Or how do you reconcile it with your ideas of truth and righteousness?

It has also been argued, that the doctrine of atonement is inconsistent with the attribute of mercy. For if God require satisfaction to be made, then, it is said, we are not saved by his

* Psalm lxxxv. 10.

free and unmerited grace. But this is a mere quibble. We ourselves do not render any adequate compensation; this is effected by the glorious Personage, who acts as our representative. That such a plan should be contrived for us, such a sacrifice provided, and that on account of this propitiation we should be fully acquitted, without any meritorious consideration on our part, must surely be allowed to be an exercise of mercy, as large and extensive as can possibly be imagined. We are “justified freely by his grace:” and not the less freely, but the more, because we are so “through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ*.” Those however, (and such are the opposers of the atonement,) who expect salvation as the reward of their own merit, do virtually frustrate and deny the grace of God †, for they claim heaven as their due; and at the same time they set aside his justice, in supposing that he requires no propitiation for sin ‡.

3. Many object to the doctrine, out of a professed regard to the interests of morality. They apprehend it to be of a licentious tendency; and argue that men will be encouraged to sin, if persuaded that they may have full and free forgiveness through the blood of Christ. We allow that

* Rom. iii. 24. † Gal. ii. 21.

‡ “Die man, or justice must, unless for him

Some other able, and as willing, pay

The rigid satisfaction, death for death.—MILTON.

the best principles may be abused for the worst of purposes; and we should not wonder, if this most important truth were by some persons to be so perverted. Be it to themselves. The Christian system, as here exhibited, will not authorize any Antinomian conclusions; but on the contrary it furnishes the strongest incentives to holiness. It represents the righteousness of God's character, the authority, demands, and sanctions of his law, and the evil of transgression, in such a point of view, as is admirably calculated to impress the human mind with the fear of offending. It gives the true penitent such an affecting sight of the dying Saviour, as cannot fail of exciting gratitude and love to him, activity, fervour, and delight, in his service. It most effectually ensures the perseverance of the believer in well-doing, because it describes the sacrifice of the cross as obtaining that grace for him, which will purify his heart, dispose and strengthen him for the performance of every duty, and render him meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Who shall say, that this has any tendency to promote licentiousness?

A forcible appeal might also be made to fact and experience, which would fully refute the objection, by shewing the good effects which the doctrine has produced. Its warmest advocates, from the time of the apostles to the present day, have usually been distinguished for the strictness

of their conduct, and their vigorous endeavours to be useful both to the bodies and souls of men. They are often therefore reproached, as carrying matters in religion too far, as being absurdly scrupulous, and extravagantly zealous. They have only to reply, (and O that all our readers may sincerely join in the declaration!) “The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him, who died for them, and rose again *!”

* 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

ESSAY XXX.

ON THE RESURRECTION AND INTERCESSION OF CHRIST.

Our security depends on the reassumed life of Christ. That He rose from the dead, appears from the Apostles' testimony,—and from the communications of his grace,—shews the truth of his doctrine,—his Deity,—the efficacy of his sacrifice,—his triumph over enemies,—and opens the kingdom of heaven to us. That He maketh intercession with the Father,—clearly declared,—typified by the Jewish High-priest,—represented by his own prayer on earth ;—for whom this intercession is carried on ;—no other necessary ;—suggests strong consolation.

WHILE we are investigating the nature and advantages of the mediatorial work of Christ, we should consider not only his sufferings, but his consequent advancement and glory. We have contemplated his humiliation and its designs ; we may now attempt to follow him in our meditations from earth to heaven, and inquire, what is his present situation and employment. The life, which he voluntarily resigned upon the cross, he

reassumed by his own absolute and sovereign agency: "I have power," said he, "to lay it down, and I have power to take it again*." We are assured, that he is still engaged in managing our concerns, and that our security is necessarily connected with his existence. Thus he declared, for the consolation of his disciples, when he was leaving them in many dangers and distresses, "Because I live, ye shall live also†." St. Paul accordingly exults in the confidence, that, as he has made peace for us by his blood, he will not now desert us, but that he will ensure our perseverance by that power, to which he is restored in heaven, and make us partakers of the glory, which he now possesses: "For, if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life‡." For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,—he died,—he rose again, and ascended up on high,—he sitteth on the throne,—and finally will come again, as the universal judge, to prove the completion of his work.—In the present essay we consider

I. His resurrection. It is a fact, ascertained by the clearest and strongest testimonies, that the same Jesus, who expired in the bitter pains of crucifixion, did return to life on the third day,

* John x. 18. † John xiv. 19. ‡ Rom. v. 10.

and, after having given incontestable proofs of this event, did go into heaven with the very body, which had been nailed to the cross and deposited in the grave. This, like all other historical matters, must rest upon probable evidence : but the evidence is so full and conclusive, as almost to amount to demonstration. Many unexceptionable witnesses, who had intimately known him, declared that they had seen him alive after his death, that they had conversed with him at several different times, and that in their presence he had ascended into heaven. This was a point, in which they were competent to decide, and could not be mistaken, nor could they possibly be actuated by any interested and unworthy motives to deceive the world. Contempt and hatred, bonds and afflictions, terminated only by a violent death, were all they could expect, and were all which most of them did receive, in such a service. Yet they continued, in defiance of the tortures which their most malicious enemies could inflict, to give the same unequivocal testimony of the resurrection of their crucified Master. No ancient fact admits of a more conclusive proof.

The apostles wrought various miracles in support of their doctrine, and insisted that they performed them only by the power of Christ. To the same influence they ascribed all the good effects of their ministry, the strength and consolation which enabled them to be faithful unto

death. The Gospel has been established far and wide; it still maintains its ground against every attack; sinners are converted by it from the error of their ways, all of whom are taught to live in constant dependence on the risen Saviour, and to expect the daily communications of his grace for their perseverance in righteousness. Nor are their hopes disappointed: they will all without exception testify, that “Christ liveth in them,” and that “his strength is made perfect in their weakness*.” These are cogent arguments, and prove incontrovertibly, that “The Lord is risen indeed,” that “He has ascended on high, and received gifts for men†.”

The resurrection being admitted, the truth of all those doctrines, which Jesus taught, must necessarily be allowed. He could not be an impostor, who had repeatedly predicted this event, pledged his veracity for its accomplishment, and rested the credit of his divine mission upon it‡. Nay more, his return to life being effected by himself as well as by his Father, “because it was not possible that he should be holden of death§,” we argue from it that he must possess those properties which are peculiar to the Deity, and that he is very God as well as very man. “He is

* Gal. ii. 20. 2 Cor. xii. 9.

† Luke xxiv. 34. Psalm lxxviii. 18.

‡ Matt. xii. 38—40. xvi. 4. Luke xviii. 33. John ii. 18—20.

§ Acts ii. 24.

declared," says St. Paul, "to be the Son of God with power,—by the resurrection from the dead*." How firm, then, is the foundation of the believer's hopes!

Equally important and full of consolation is the well-attested fact, as evincing the efficacy of that sacrifice which was offered upon the cross. "It was exacted, and he was made answerable †." He surrendered himself into the hands of justice, and, had he failed in the stipulated payment, we conclude that he would not have been discharged. But his release from the prison of the grave is no other than a public acknowledgment from the Father, that his oblation was accepted, and full satisfaction received. This appears to be the view, in which it is represented to the Romans; "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification ‡." Our dependence, then, upon his atonement, will not disappoint us. While he rises from the sepulchre, it is declared, as by a voice from heaven, that he has answered all the purposes, for which he laid down his life. But how tremendous the contrary supposition! If he be still detained a prisoner, the ransom is insufficient: "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins §."

He came forth from the grave like a mighty conqueror, triumphing over all the enemies, with

* Rom. i. 4. † Bp. Lowth's Translation of Isa. liii. 7.

‡ Rom. iv. 25. § 1 Cor. xv. 17.

whom he had been engaged in severe conflict. Now it appeared, that he had bruised the serpent's head, and "through death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil*." "He led captivity captive;" and, "having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly †." But the victory obtained was intended for our benefit. It was on our behalf, not his own, that he undertook to oppose that formidable host: and from his triumph over them we derive the strongest consolation. "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered ‡." Satan may be permitted to shew his malignity against us; but he shall not prevail. Our bodies must be consigned to the dust, but they shall not be detained there. "I am," saith our Lord, "the resurrection and the life:"—"I will raise you up at the last day §." In this confidence we may exult and sing, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?—Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ ||."

But by the reassumed life and glory of Christ our views are directed to that state of honour and felicity, which he now possesses, and of which, we are assured, we also shall be partakers through

* Heb. ii. 14. † Psalm lxxviii. 18. Col. ii. 15.

‡ Isa. xlix. 25. § John vi. 40. xi. 25.

|| 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57.

faith in his name. He is gone into heaven as a public character, as the Head and Representative of his believing people. "The Forerunner is for us entered within the vail *." His admission, then, into the beatific presence of his Father, amounts to a full proof, that all "who are Christ's" shall have their portion with him. They are encouraged to expect, that they shall "sit with him in his throne †:" for thus he declared, when taking his leave of the earth, "I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also ‡." This doctrine, we perceive, is not a point of cold abstract speculation: it is replete with comfort. It raises our affections; it animates our feeble efforts; it gilds the gloomy prospects of life, and inspires the soul with gratitude, confidence, and joy. We are constrained to cry out, in the language of devout thanksgiving and exultation, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away §."—In contemplating our exalted Saviour, we consider

* Heb. vi. 20.

† Rev. iii. 21.

‡ John xiv. 2, 3.

§ 1 Peter i. 3, 4.

II. His intercession at the right hand of God. This must be altogether a matter of faith : no human observation or reasoning can afford us any information or assistance in our inquiries. Our belief of it rests entirely on the declarations of the holy scriptures ; and in them it is explicitly and repeatedly asserted, that our Lord, notwithstanding his present exaltation in glory, is still carrying on his purposes of mercy in various ways. Though a charge of guilt be preferred against us in the court of heaven, yet he appears there as our Advocate, and, in consequence of the plea, which he suggests in our favour, the sentence of condemnation will be prevented or reversed *.

We pretend not to understand in what manner his mediation is there performed : different descriptions are given of it, to assist our conceptions, but they will not admit of a minute explanation. He is seated “ on the right hand of the Majesty on high †,” that being the place of most honourable distinction and highest advancement : yet in some sort he is represented as a suppliant ; “ He maketh intercession for us ‡.” He is most frequently compared to the Jewish high-priest, who was an eminent type of him, especially in that part of his office, when on the great day of atonement he went into the most holy place, and offered up prayers for the people. None but the

* 1 John ii. 1. † Heb. i. 3. ‡ Rom. viii. 34.

descendants of Aaron were permitted to go within the vail, and they only on that peculiar solemnity, with the blood of the appointed sacrifices : and we are taught, in the epistle to the Hebrews, that they were intended to be exhibited as emblems of Him, who alone can approach unto God for us *. He has rent the vail, and entered into heaven ; where he presents himself before his Father as the sacrifice of sinners, and for the sake of his own blood supplicates a favourable acceptance for all them that believe.

It is not necessary or proper to understand this description in the literal sense : it is strongly figurative. There is no need to suppose, that the Redeemer has occasion to make use of any arguments or entreaties in such a sort, as if the Father were unwilling to grant the mercy, which he asks for us. But the expressions are evidently accommodated to our weakness, and yet are adapted to excite holy affections in us. They imply that the Saviour still feels a tender solicitude for his church below, that a way of access is opened by his mediation, and that it is his atonement which renders this mediation efficacious.

It is obvious, that his intercession differs widely from any prayers or supplications, which we may offer up for one another. We can ask nothing but in his name, and for the sake of his merito-

* Heb. ix. and x.

rious oblation; but he can solicit on his own account, or rather he may claim the blessing, as a part of his own purchase. He gave a beautiful specimen of the nature of his intercession, the night before he suffered, when commending his beloved disciples to the care of their gracious God. Thus he prayed, “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me. —I WILL that they be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory*.” This is a form of petitioning, which no other can use: the language is appropriate to Him, who could say, “Father, I thank thee that Thou hast heard me: and I knew that Thou hearest me always;—for I do always those things that please Thee†.”

It will be of far greater importance to us, to secure the benefits of his mediation, than to give a minute explanation of its nature. He himself declared, “I pray not for the world‡.” He presents not to his Father the names of those, who contemptuously reject his grace: but let none, who are willing to accept it on his own terms, be discouraged. All such persons he will take under his care, sympathize with them in their distresses, and make mention of their cases before God. “He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make

* John xvii. 11, 24. † John xi. 41, 42. viii. 29.

‡ John xvii. 9.

intercession for them *.” The question is, Do we so come? Do we sincerely return to that God, from whom we have deeply revolted? And in our approaches to him, do we supplicate and depend on the gracious interposition of the Saviour, that he may procure us a favourable audience, and conciliate the merciful regard of his Father to us and our services? If this be not the temper of our minds towards him, we do not truly acknowledge him in the character and office of a High-priest, nor shall we receive the benefit of his intercession. He disdains not the application of the meanest petitioner; and such is his influence, that he must prevail for all those, whose cause he undertakes. He will manage their concerns with fidelity and success; but he requires their unreserved submission and confidence. It is not enough, that we conclude our prayers in his name, or call him our Mediator and Advocate. Alas! we fear that this is often done with an unmeaning formality, or pharisaical self-dependence: and all such addresses he must consider as contemptuous insults.

Little need be said, to shew the absurdity and sinfulness of supplicating the intercession of angels or departed saints. We have no authority from scripture to conclude, that they can ask any thing for us on their own account, or that they

* Heb. vii. 25.

can receive any applications from us, or even understand our various cases and necessities. Where also, we might inquire, is the propriety of suing for their assistance? It is a false and pretended humility, to say that we are unworthy to go immediately and in the first instance to the Saviour, without a previous introduction. For does he not permit, invite, and command us to come directly to himself? To suppose that he is unwilling to undertake for us, or that any other intercession with the Father can be requisite, as if his were not efficacious, is to cast a base reproach upon his character. He is the alone and all-prevailing "Mediator between God and men*."

A due regard to him as executing this office for us will produce the most salutary effects. It will encourage us to persevere with a holy firmness in the Christian cause, and under every possible trouble or temptation to present our addresses to God, without fearing a repulse. "Seeing then that we have a great High-priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an High-priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace,

* 1 Tim. ii. 5.

that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*.”

Though we be oppressed with a sense of guilt, and covered with confusion by the remembrance of base and aggravated declensions, this doctrine is calculated to revive and animate our hopes. “I have prayed for thee,” said the compassionate Saviour to the backsliding Peter†. “And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous‡.” He can prevail for our recovery, and for our full and everlasting forgiveness. If therefore we commit our cause to him, we may face a host of enemies, and ask in triumph, “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us§.”

But as “no man cometh unto the Father but by Him||,” the destruction of those who reject him will be unavoidable and tremendous beyond all conception. Their neglect and contempt of all that gracious provision, which is made for a sinner’s salvation, will exceedingly aggravate their doom and misery. That precious blood, which once pleaded, “Father, forgive them,” and still

* Heb. iv. 14—16. † Luke xxii. 32.

‡ 1 John ii. 1. § Rom. viii. 34.

|| John xiv. 6.

“ speaketh better things than that of Abel,” will shortly cry unto God against them, and demand the execution of threatened and deserved vengeance. And when the Intercessor himself becomes their enemy, who shall entreat for them? Or who shall be able to stand in the judgment before him?

ESSAY XXXI.

ON THE MEDIATORIAL GOVERNMENT AND SECOND ADVENT OF CHRIST.

Jesus Christ is King as well as Priest. The mediatorial government intrusted to him,—implies no inferiority to the Father,—is universal and absolute,—secures to his people the supply of all their wants,—affords them protection,—ensures their perseverance,—requires obedience,—not yet acknowledged, as it will be.—His second Advent is foretold,—will be glorious.—He will then complete the salvation of the redeemed,—destroy his enemies,—and resign his mediatorial authority.

IT is, as we have seen, of great importance, that the Saviour reassumed that life, which he voluntarily resigned upon the cross. This proves incontestably the firmness of that foundation, on which our hopes are built: it opens a never-failing source of comfort to the true believer, and secures to him those communications of light and strength, which are indispensably requisite for his perseverance in righteousness, and for his final attainment of the heavenly felicity. We

rejoice that Jesus Christ, being exalted to the highest glory, is still prosecuting in various ways the object of his mediation, and fulfilling his engagements. He presides over “the church, which he hath purchased with his own blood *,” and affords protection and support to the meanest individual. On this therefore we ground our expectation, that “we shall be saved by his life † :” and he himself has taught us to regard him in that state of elevation, to which he ascended from the earth, for the establishment of our confidence ; “I am He that liveth, and was dead ; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death ‡. Let us then consider

I. His mediatorial government. We have already remarked, that as an High-priest, having “entered into the holy place,” he appears there as our Intercessor : but now we must observe, that he is not a mere suppliant ; he possesses authority : “the kingdom is his, and He is the governor among the nations §.” Thus it was predicted, and the event has now verified the description, “He shall sit and rule upon his throne ; and he shall be A PRIEST UPON HIS THRONE ||.” He was accordingly typified by Melchizedek, as uniting the regal and sacerdotal offices in one person ; and throughout the scriptures he is represented, even in his mediatorial capacity, as Head

* Acts xx. 28. † Rom. v. 10. ‡ Rev. i. 18.

§ Psal. xxii. 28. || Zech. vi. 13.

over all things, our Leader and Commander, our Prince, our Lawgiver, and our King. These are characters, which demand from us the most serious and devout attention.

This government, which is in the hands of Jesus, is allowed to be of a peculiar sort. Considered in his human nature, he is advanced to it, and intrusted with its administration, for the special purpose of completing his work. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour*." But, though he receives it from his Father, this is no proof of inferiority, previous to his assumption of the manhood. For it should seem, that if he were less than God he would be incapable of sustaining the high office, to which he is appointed. The discharge of its various functions requires, that he possess those perfections, which are appropriate to Deity, and therefore incommunicable; such are Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence.

He maintains an universal dominion. He is "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." "All things are put under his feet:" and he is given "to be the Head over all things to the Church†." He is "the Prince of the kings of the earth‡," the most exalted of whom are only

* Acts v. 31.

† Eph. i. 21, 22.

‡ Rev. i. 5.

as his vassals and instruments, disposed of and employed by him according to his sovereign pleasure:—"KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS *." Is this a description at all applicable

to a mere creature? Without adverting to other worlds, which form also a part of his dominion, it most concerns us to remember, that "He doeth all his will among the inhabitants of the earth."

All persons, with all their various circumstances and affairs, are entirely under his control. The rain falls where he appoints; the lightnings and the stormy winds receive their direction from him, and fulfil his word. The desolations produced by earthquakes, wars, pestilence, and famine, are his judgments, and are rendered subservient to his wise and righteous purposes. The rise and fall of kingdoms depend upon his pleasure; and amidst all the confusion of political revolutions and the destruction of mightiest empires, he is uniformly pursuing and accomplishing his own plans. He determines the bounds of our habitations, and the changes in our families: our comforts and our trials, as to their nature, measure, and continuance, are no other than what he appoints, and sees most expedient. This dominion, which he exercises, is also as absolute as it is universal. When he will work, none shall let it. However his counsel

* Rev. xix. 16.

may be resisted, nothing can prevent its execution: and, notwithstanding our ignorant and presumptuous cavils, he ruleth according to his own sovereign pleasure, nor is he accountable to us for any of his matters.

These are truths which are more generally acknowledged, than practically regarded. But surely it ought to be the subject of our serious inquiry, whether we possess those dispositions of mind towards the Saviour, which his high exaltation demands from us. The Gospel requires all men every where to yield unfeigned submission to this King of Zion; and wherever the call proves effectual, the most rebellious are constrained to throw down their arms, and rejoice in his government. There in a more especial sense he reigns, his grace prevails, and his throne is established, not only in the heavens, but in the hearts of a willing and an affectionate people. To persons of this description the subject before us is particularly addressed; and it is full of consolation. You may contemplate with admiration, confidence, and joy, the character of him who hath the dominion. He lives, and he rules, for you.

He will provide for all your wants. Great as he is, yet such is his condescension, that he sympathizes with you in your troubles, and will send you seasonable and adequate relief. He careth for you, as the Head for every member of the

body *: and since “ the earth is his, and the fulness thereof †,” he can readily supply you with whatever may be needful for your temporal support. But you should regard him more especially as having all spiritual blessings treasured up in himself, and dispensing them with a liberal hand, though in various measures, to his Church. He will communicate to you, as your cases may require, an increase of knowledge, holiness, strength, and comfort. For these purposes he will guide you with his counsel ‡; he will sit over you, with minute attention and solicitude, “ as a refiner and purifier of silver,” that he may purify you to himself §;—His grace shall be sufficient for you ||; —He will manifest himself to you, take up his abode in your hearts **, and never leave you nor forsake you ††. Yes, such is described to be the nature of his spiritual kingdom. Even in his highest exaltation, “ he is your life ‡‡ :” at no time will he be unmindful of the meanest of his subjects; nor can he ever be incompetent to provide for all the myriads, over whom his dominion extends.

He will afford you protection in every season of danger. It is one considerable advantage of regal government, that power is lodged in the hands of the Sovereign for the defence of each

* Eph. iv. 16. v. 23, 29. † Psalm xxiv. 1.

‡ Psal. lxxiii. 24. § Mal. iii. 3. || 2 Cor. xii. 9.

** John xiv. 21—23. †† Heb. xiii. 5. ‡‡ Col. iii. 4.

part of the community : and such is the benefit you enjoy in the kingdom of Christ. If you have sworn allegiance to him, you will be assaulted by various potent and malignant enemies on this very account : and you know that in yourselves you are too feeble and timid, to make effectual resistance. But he, into whose service you have entered, is mighty, and “ his strength will be made perfect in your weakness *.” He is your Leader, as well as Commander, who goes before you to the combat, and he encourages you to “ quit yourselves like men,” under this confidence, that he stands by you to save you, and will give you the victory. As your Captain he manages the contest, and must prevail. He will not suffer himself to be despoiled of any of his faithful soldiers and subjects : but all his adversaries and your’s shall be confounded and perish. How much better is it, then, to be “ on the Lord’s side,” with all the contempt and distress to which it may expose you, than to unite with his foes, however great and prosperous they may now appear !

He will ensure your perseverance and salvation. This indeed follows from our last remark. To what purpose is his protection afforded, and his strength exerted for you, if you may finally be destroyed ? To maintain this, would be to

* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

charge him with folly, weakness, or inconstancy. Having “delivered you from the power of darkness, and translated you into his own kingdom,” he will not desert you at the last. He hath said, “I give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand *.” The termination of the whole scheme, then, will be glorious: he will shortly receive you into his immediate presence, where you shall behold and admire his majesty, and be swallowed up in the contemplation of his excellency and his love for ever and ever. With such assurances, what have you to fear? or why should you shrink from suffering? Your despondency reflects dishonour upon him. But recollect also,

He requires your obedience. This consideration can never be separated from that of his regal character: so closely are our duties and our privileges connected together! As a Prince, invested with sovereign authority, he has enacted laws, by which he commands you to regulate your spirit and conduct. This is not to be accounted a grievance. His precepts are “holy and just and good.” He enjoins you nothing but that which will promote your peace, he forbids you nothing but that which tends to present as well as future misery. This is a subjection you would not wish to be dispensed with: it is the

* John x. 28.

most perfect freedom. We need not add, that it is absolutely requisite : you cannot truly acknowledge his authority without it. Thus he argues with insincere and inconsistent professors of his Gospel ; “ Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say * ? ” To how many among us may this reproof be applied ! Are we not objecting to the strictness of his commands, or quarrelling with his appointments ? And what does this evince, but a foolish and wicked disposition to take the reins of government out of his hands, as if we were more competent to rule ? Let us fear to provoke his anger by our presumptuous opposition. “ The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces : out of heaven shall he thunder upon them : the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth † . ”

The kingdom of Christ, we have seen, is universal, with respect to the exercise of his power ; but it is not so, as to the influence of his grace. Yet, gloomy as appearances now are, through the prevalence of infidelity and profaneness, we are taught to look for better times. Very soon will the darkness be past, and the true light shine over all the earth. The favoured season, of which such glorious things are spoken in the ancient prophecies, is rapidly advancing : and perhaps we may already perceive some remarkable pre-

* Luke vi. 46.

† 1 Sam. ii. 10.

parations for it. The Lord Jesus has “girded his sword upon his thigh,—and in his majesty he will ride prosperously *,” till he has subdued all nations to the obedience of faith. All opposition to his government will be crushed, and truth and righteousness universally established. He will at length vindicate his authority and his right to the throne: and having “taken to him his great power †,” he will reign gloriously. Then, it should seem, the earth as well as heaven will continually resound with this song of loud thanksgiving, “Alleluia! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth ‡.” Before that time arrive, though it be not very distant, we shall probably sleep in the dust: but the prospect of it, for the sake of others, and for the glory of God, should cheer and animate our hearts. We also, in our respective places, may be promoting and helping forward the great design: and as to ourselves, we should be waiting and diligently preparing for the coming of our Lord, that we may have confidence towards him, both at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment. It remains only that we consider

II. His glorious return. This second Advent was frequently predicted. Such were his own explicit declarations, “The Son of man shall come in his glory §:”—“I will come again ||:”

* Psalm xlv. 3, 4.

† Rev. xi. 17.

‡ Rev. xix. 6.

• § Matt. xxv. 31.

|| John xiv. 3.

—“ Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven *.” And to the same purpose also, upon his departure from the earth, the encouraging assurance was given by angels to his mourning disciples, “ This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven †.” These prophecies will surely be fulfilled in due season. “ For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry ‡.”

His retinue and the whole of his appearance will be inconceivably magnificent. Attended by all the heavenly hosts, and by myriads of redeemed saints, he will exhibit in himself the full glory of the Deity. He will take his seat upon the throne ;—He will raise the dead ;—He will summon the whole human race to his bar ;—and with an authority, which none can dispute, He will judge the very secrets of men, and by an infallible discrimination He will consign them to everlasting happiness or misery, in exact proportion to their works. He will vindicate his own character, which had been so shamefully calumniated, and put a final termination to all opposition against himself. “ For He must reign,” in his mediatorial government, “ till he hath put all enemies under his feet §.” How complete his

* Matt. xxvi. 64. † Acts i. 11.

‡ Heb. x. 37.

§ 1 Cor. xv. 25.

manifestation and his triumph, when “every knee shall bow to him, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father * !”

He will then perfect the redemption of his people. He, who is “the resurrection and the life,” will rescue their bodies from the grave, and build them again in a bright and glorious form, like unto his own. That will be the declaration of their “adoption,” for which they now wait †. They will be acknowledged and honoured as “the sons of God.” He “will wipe away tears from off all faces ; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth ‡.” He will publish to the assembled universe his love to them, and their grateful returns to him : thus, while he manifests both his own righteousness and their integrity, he will vindicate and glorify himself in absolving them from every charge, and admitting them to participate of that “fulness of joy, which is in his presence, and of those pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore §.” What shouts of praise and exultation will then be raised, when “He shall appear, unto them that look for him, the second time without sin unto salvation || !”

* Phil. ii. 10, 11.

† Rom. viii. 23.

‡ Isa. xxv. 8.

§ Psalm xvi. 11.

|| Heb. ix. 28.

He will also confound and destroy his enemies. He bears long with their perverse and insolent contempt, and even “waits to be gracious” to the most rebellious. But that will be the day of his wrath, when the finally impenitent “shall eat of the fruit of their own ways* ;” for “the fiery indignation shall devour the adversaries †.” They must obey his summons, however reluctantly, and stand at his judgment-seat. O what horror and dismay will cover them, when they shall see Him, whom by their sins they pierced, and when he shall proceed to make a public declaration of their base and malignant principles and conduct! He will unmask the most specious hypocrites, and expose their secret abominations. All, of every description, “who would not that he should reign over them,” must depart from him; and to evince the righteousness of his decisions, he will set before them, and the whole creation shall witness, the things which they have done. The execution of the sentence can neither be prevented nor delayed; and therefore they must go under his curse “into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels ‡.” “There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth §,” from a sense of misery and in utter despondency; for “their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched ||.”

* Prov. i. 31.

† Heb. x. 27.

‡ Matt. xxv. 41.

§ Matt. xiii. 42.

|| Mark ix. 44.

This awful discrimination of characters being made, and the states of all mankind being unalterably fixed, the Son of God will resign the mediatorial government, which he now maintains: He will give up his commission to the Father, from whom he received it, the purposes of it being fully accomplished. The work, which he has undertaken, will then be finished, and the office which he now sustains, being no longer wanted, will cease. Such is the plain and obvious interpretation of St. Paul's description, "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father:—And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto Him, that put all things under him, that God may be all in all*." Nothing more is meant than the resignation of that peculiar authority, with which he is intrusted for the recovery, protection, and final salvation, of all the members of his Church. These important points being secured, he retires from the post which was delegated to him, and acts no longer in his mediatorial capacity. But this abdication of his office does no more imply any real inferiority in the Son, than his first acceptance of it did. And we are not to consider one divine Person exclusively, but the three together, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as being that God, who

* 1 Cor. xv. 24—28.

will be all in all for ever. Most assuredly, the Lord Christ, equally with the Father and the Spirit, possesses a glory and a sovereignty which he will not, cannot, surrender. He will sit upon the throne as the object of unceasing and eternal adoration: "Of his kingdom there shall be no end*;"—"and He shall reign for ever and ever†."

Such are the descriptions given of our exalted Redeemer. But with what affections of mind do we contemplate his character? Do we rejoice, that so adequate a provision is made for our wants, so firm a foundation laid for our hopes? And have we indeed "beheld the glory of this only-begotten of the Father?" or "received of his fulness, grace for grace‡?" Are the designs of his mediation, with respect to ourselves, likely to be answered? Are we maintaining continual regard to him in all his offices, and so persevering in faith and holiness, that we may say with humble confidence, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory§?" These are most interesting inquiries: How can we rest, till they are satisfactorily resolved? Unless we are quickened by the Spirit of Christ, and conformed to his image in this world, we shall not "be numbered with his saints in glory everlasting." But if after reading

* Luke i. 33.

† Rev. xi. 15.

‡ John i. 14, 16.

§ Col. iii. 4.

all the descriptions of his excellency, and the invitations of his mercy, we can still despise or neglect him, our character is most base, and our sentence will be most tremendous. “ If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be ANATHEMA, MARANATHA *.” Then, “ who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand, when he appeareth †?” May his grace sanctify us, that we may be “ a people prepared for the Lord!” May we “ abide in him, that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming ‡!” Amen.

* 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

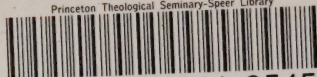
† Mal. iii. 2.

‡ 1 John ii. 28.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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